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DIRECT FROM JAPAN

ANIME REVIEWS

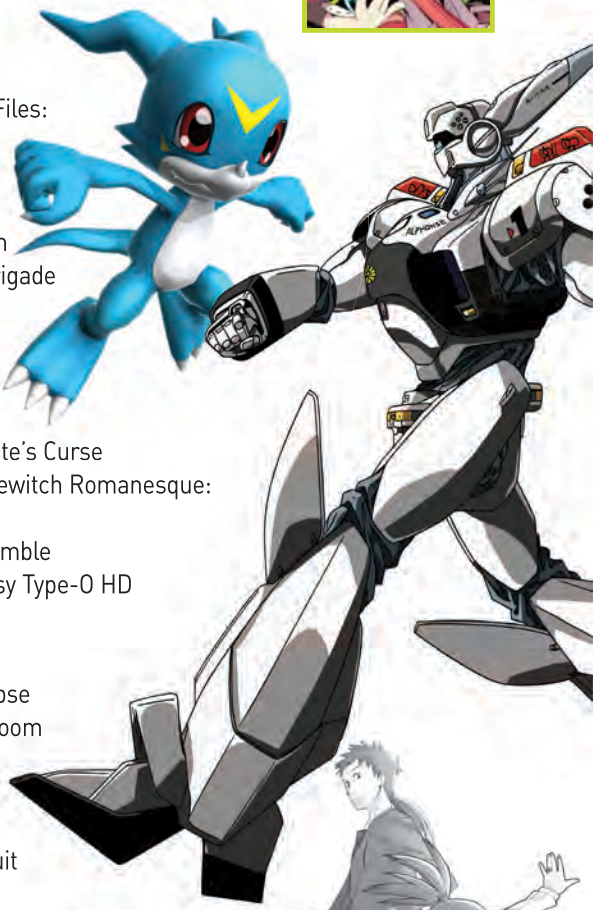
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ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

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ULTRAMAN

Crunchyroll keeps adding more *Ultraman* to its streaming stable, and we keep watching it! Read our thoughts on some of the other *Ultra*-offerings.



NARUTO

Masashi Kishimoto's work on the *Naruto* series proper may be done, but there's plenty in store for everyone's favorite orange-clad hero.



YOUR LIE IN APRIL

Beyond the feature we have a look at more of the *Your Lie in April* anime.

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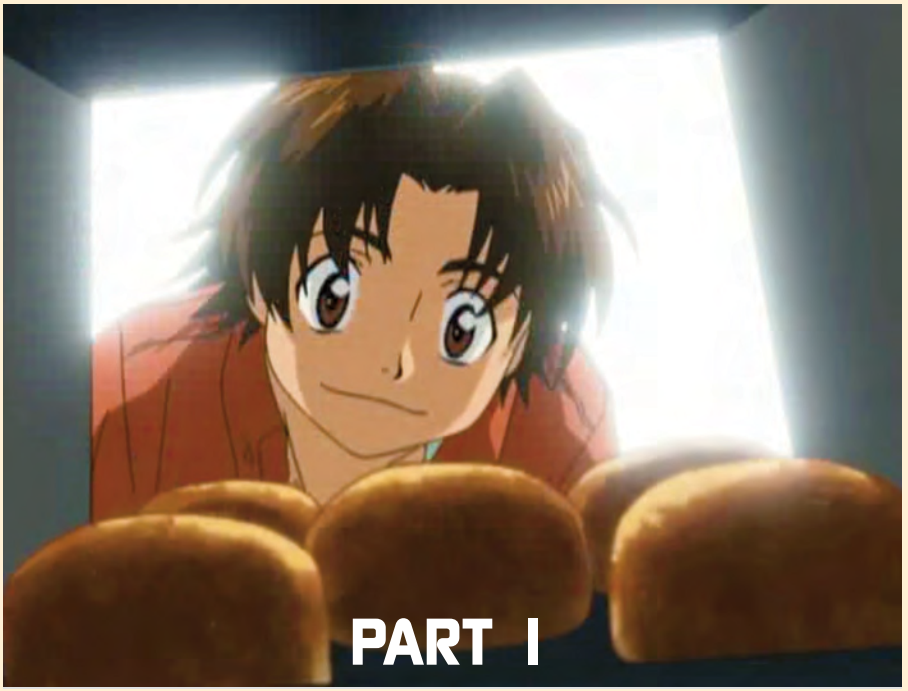




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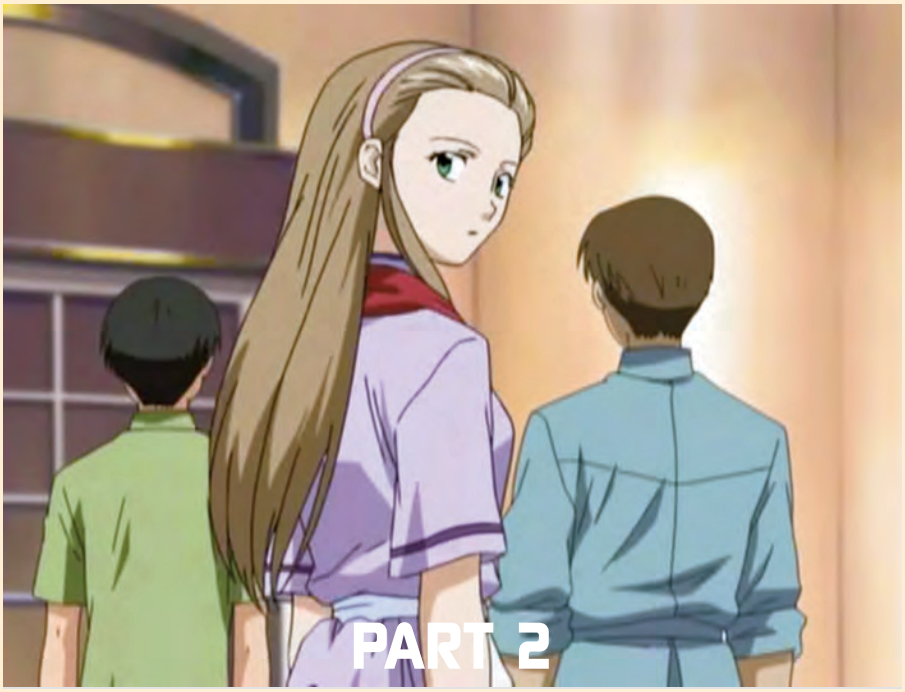


Yakitate!! Japan

Kazuma Azuma wants to make bread. Not just any kind of bread, though. He wants to make a bread that represents Japan itself and can stand toe-to-toe with rice as a national food. Thanks to his legendary "Hands of the Sun," unnaturally warm hands that allow dough to ferment faster, Kazuma's bread is like a slice of Heaven.

And when the Pantasia Rookie Competition arrives, everyone will get a taste of his skill! Along with his friend Kawachi (who's only in it for the dough), he'll go up against koala karate masters, Harvard bread scientists, samurai with rolling-pin swords, and more! Can Kazuma create bread like naan other and bake his way to glory, or should he quit before he's toast?

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April 2015

TRAILERS



Gingitsune: Messenger Fox of the Gods
Sentai Filmworks

In Japan, it is said that if you pray to a deity with sincerity, you will surely feel the divine presence. As the successor of the Saeki Inari Shrine, Makoto Saeki can see and speak with spirits, and messengers of the Gods since her mother's funeral, including Gintarou, the irritable fox-like Herald who's protected the Saeki shrine for hundreds of years.



Hozuki's Coolheadedness
Sentai Filmworks

The most difficult job in all creation belongs to Hozuki, Hell's hardest working bureaucrat. Hozuki is Deputy Chief to Enma, the King of Hell. Enma spends all his time sitting in judgment of the recently deceased, so it's up to Hozuki to keep the Hell running smoothly. And that would be hellishly complicated even if Hell wasn't constantly short on good help.



Space Brothers
Sentai Filmworks

Mutta's life has hit rock bottom. Meanwhile, the career of Mutta's brother, Hibito, has taken off as he trains for the job Mutta once dreamed of: becoming an astronaut. But with a bit of covert activity, Mutta's family and friends can get his resume on the right desk, and from that point on it'll be up to Mutta himself. Does he have what it takes to turn his life around and put his footprint on the moon?



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editorial

(That Was) the Year That Was

HEY, THIS IS PATRICK and hey, this is the latest issue if *Otaku USA* magazine. Can you dig it? Well, now that you can, what do we have in store for you this time? Allow me to gaze into my magical mysterious crystal ball (the table of contents, actually) powered by the very best in anime, manga, games, and Japanese pop culture craziness ...

A ninja named "Naruto" (perhaps you've heard of him) dominates our minds and our cover this month as the decades long "road to ninja" begins to wind down on an era all but defined by a ninja named "Naruto" (perhaps you've heard of him). Daryl Surat reports ... Elsewhere, Brittany Vincent explores the pluses and minuses of falling in love with an undead zombie girl in her piece on *Sankarea: Undying Love.* Romance hovers in the air, sticks around, and transforms into a supernatural slice of life as Kristina Potts brings us a deep and longing look at *Gingitsune.* Meanwhile, the mystery writer known only as Ink explores the musical scales (and heartstrings) of *Your Lie in April.* Finally, Brittany Vincent climbs into a giant robot mecha and blasts off for deep space in her piece on *Knights of Sidonia.* Whew!



So what else is going on? Well, right now, it's about 2:30 PM sometime in early December. I'm about 72 hours away from shipping out to Tokyo again this year for the holidays, so I'm trying to tie this issue up with some fancy wrapping paper and a big red bow and put it under the tree and RUN. I'm too high strung and wiry to ever totally unplug for anything resembling a "real vacation," but I'm looking forward to the slightly slower pace that Tokyo moves at during the march to the massive New Year's holiday. Before that comes the massively tacky Japanese take on Christmas complete with illumination overkill, seasonal products galore, constant Santa suit abuse, and George Michael's "Last Christmas" and Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas Is You" on repeat the entire time. It's intense, sure, but least I know what I'm getting into ...

Also, since this ranks as our last issue of *OUSA* for the year, it seems as good a time as any to do a little looking back on the fast-forward blur that was the last 12 months. The main thing is we held in there and actually did some growth on the digital side of the biz via our Facebook page ("like" it now!) and official website (go there and hit "refresh" a lot). We've even increased our publishing output quite a bit in the form of a special print issue that snuck out along with some PDF only publications available as free downloads. And yes, surely you must know the drill by now, YOU'VE GOT TO CATCH 'EM ALL!

It all boils down to a massive THANKS to you, our totally awesome readers, for supporting us over the last year and making it all worthwhile.

Now enjoy the new issue of *Otaku USA*!


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LETTERS/**TEGAMI**



Tokyo Ghoul



DRAMAtical Murder

Dear *Otaku USA,*
Hello this is Katrina! I have been wanting to write to your magazine for a while. I absolutely appreciate *Otaku USA* because if it wasn't for you guys I would not have met the love of my life. I'm sure you don't hear that often! In January 2012, I met my future fiancé Michael reading *Otaku USA* in a store. I was just stopping by because I buy *Otaku USA* monthly and I just happened to stop and began to chat with this young man. We exchanged numbers, went on dates, and before we went to the local convention Naka-kon in Kansas in February, we knew we were meant to be. On Valentine's Day, it was official and since then, Michael would never fail to buy me your magazine every month. We would subscribe but it seems more special to us this way. Well, now it is November 2014 and we got engaged a day before my birthday. I always think back that if *Otaku USA* had never existed, I would never have met my fiancé and soon to be husband! So THANK YOU, OTAKU USA!

- Katrina

Hi Katrina! Thanks so much for your message ... Wow, we're sort of in shock here. This is probably one of the most remarkable letters we've ever received. In fact, WE KNOW IT IS. Nothing much to say except to give a massive congratulations to both you guys and to wish you many, many years of happiness together! Who would've guessed that our magazine about anime, manga, and stuff like that would wind up a matchmaker? We're chuffed all the same!

Dear O*taku USA,*
First of all I would like to say how much of a fan of your magazine I am. I have been a subscriber for over three years now and am always looking forward to your next issue, but today, I would like to point out a mistake I found in the February 2015 issue. It arrived today and I was ecstatic as usual, especially to see that for one of the free preview chapters it was of *Demon From Afar!* by Kaori Yuki who is one of my favorite manga artists and I have been looking forward to this release for a while now, but it seems that the wrong manga was placed in its spot. It looks that instead you put the manga adaptation to *Bladedance of Elementalers.* Though I am sad I can't read the preview chapter I wanted, I know that mistakes like this are often made so I'll just have to buy the book when it comes out (which I was going to do anyways). Please keep up the great work!

- Crissie



Hi Crissie! Thanks for your email and detective skills. You and many other readers also caught this error, boo-boo, whatever you want to call it, for which we profusely apologize! We're happy that you'll pick up *Bladedance of Elementalers* and hope that others will do the same!

Hello *Otaku USA*! I had just started reading this magazine and I have a few questions about a new anime that I found. It's called *DRAMAtical Murder* and it's a really vivid and exciting anime. I was wondering if it might show up in this magazine anytime soon. If it does, please let me know! Second question I have is where can I get the *Cosplay USA* magazine? I can only find the *Otaku USA* mag but not the cosplay one. Anyways, I'm super happy about finding this magazine and thank you for making it!

- kawaii seragaki

Hi kawaii seragaki! Thanks for your letter. Not sure when you sent it off to be delivered, but it turns out we did indeed wind up running a feature on *DRAMAtical Murder* in our February 2015 issue (the one with *One Piece* on the cover). Also, physical copies of our 2013 *Cosplay USA* special issue are tough to come by now, BUT you can still get your mitts on a digital copy at our webstore located at otakuusamagazine.com. And what do you know? You can also nab copies of our *DRAMAtical Murder* issue too. So life is good. End of commercial!

Otaku USA:
I'm new to your magazine and the issues I have purchased so far have been amazing. I really like the fact that you review a lot of anime and manga that aren't as well known. I was wondering if you'd previously published a feature on *Tokyo Ghoul*? It's possibly my favorite anime, and I think it would look great on the magazine cover. And thank you to all the people at *Otaku USA* and their hard work.

- Imogen

Hi Imogen! Thanks for your message and thanks for all your kind word! Sorry that somehow *Tokyo Ghoul* has slipped past our radar over the last few issues, but it's a darn good suggestion. We can definitely promise you some kind of coverage (if not exactly the cover itself) in the next few issues. In the meantime, please enjoy a pic of that there *Ghoul from Tokyo* on this page right here!

And there you have it ... more lucky letters rescued from the mail sack. Now give us more! Please send your questions, comments, queries, requests, and assorted ephemera to otakuusa@gmail.com!



FREE! From the Editors of Otaku USA magazine



What's the Best Anime?

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Everyone has their own idea of what is the best anime, including the editors of Otaku USA. We tried to come up with a nice, neat, list but we couldn't! There are just too many fabulous anime out there.

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By Joseph Luster

Random Stuff for the J-Nerd Lifestyle

Hyperdevotion Noire: Goddess Black Heart Delivers More Neptunia Charm

We've been fortunate enough to enjoy localizations of Compile Heart's *Hyperdimension Neptunia* RPG series over the years, including the recently emerging PS Vita remakes. Now it's spin-off time with *Hyperdevotion Noire: Goddess Black Heart,* which was originally released on PS Vita in Japan as *Noire Gekishin Black Heart.* The next stop for the strategy-RPG is North America and Europe, where it's slated to take over sometime in early 2015 courtesy of Idea Factory International.

As the first SRPG in the franchise, *Hyperdevotion* has a bunch of new ideas to toss into the mix, starting with the fact that it's not set in the familiar world of Gamindustri. Instead, *Hyperdevotion* takes place in the similar but separate world of Gamarket. The story this time around finds the CPUs of each of the four nations locked in a heated battle against one another for dominion over the world. Noire is but a step away from taking over when an unknown force robs the CPUs of their powers, forcing them to unite Gamarket and defend the world together.

Since *Hyperdevotion* is strategy heavy, players can look forward to grid-based battles, unique systems, item customization, and more. If that sounds too intense, there's an opportunity to relax with the Sim Noire mode, which lets you chill at home, buy furniture and accessories, and develop a social life for a nice battle-weary breather.









Etrian Odyssey Mixes It Up with the Mystery Dungeon Series

In the world of crossovers, you probably won't find one that makes much more sense than a mash-up between Atlus' *Etrian Odyssey* and Spike Chunsoft's *Mystery Dungeon. Etrian Odyssey and the Mystery Dungeon* is pretty much exactly what it sounds like, taking two great tastes and slapping them together for a crossover RPG that's due to hit Nintendo 3DS in Japan on March 5, 2015.

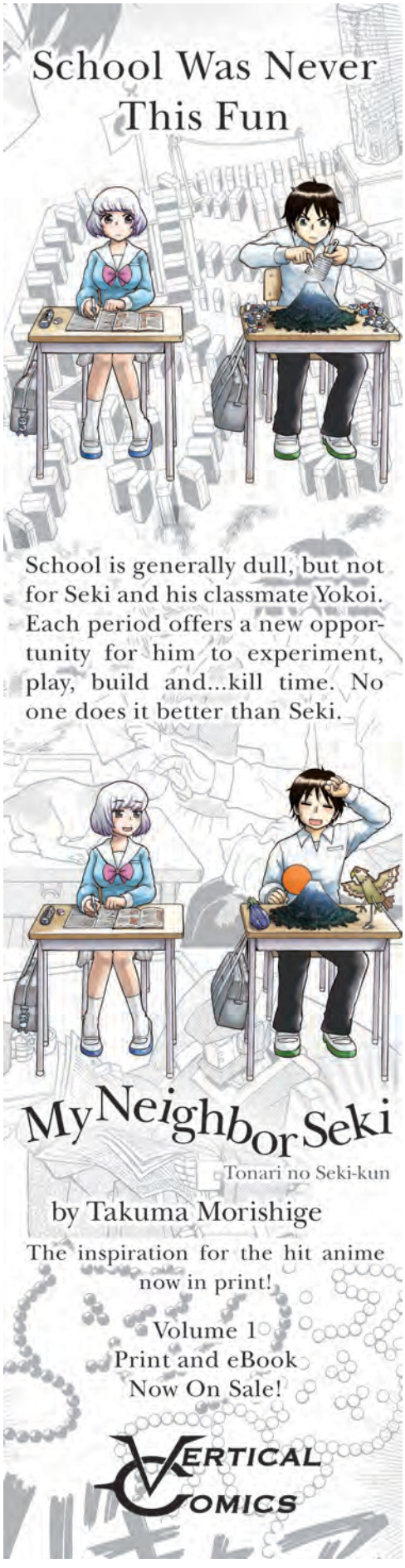






Etrian Odyssey and the Mystery Dungeon takes us away from the first-person trappings of the former and into the overhead exploration of the latter. Once characters are created and properly outfitted, players will be able to leap into dungeons that are always changing, leveling up and facing a slew of monsters and devious traps along the way. This 3DS adventure was announced at the same time as *Etrian Odyssey V*, and thankfully it didn't take long for Atlus USA to announce plans to bring it over next year as *Etrian Mystery Dungeon.*


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All Hands on Deck for Kantai Collection Musashi Kai Figures!

Figure and model manufacturer Good Smile Company has some new figures to add to its Wonderful Hobby Selection series of high-quality releases. Known for its craftsmanship and design, the line's next additions bring Musashi and Musashi Kai of browser-based card game sensation *Kantai Collection* (aka *KanColle*) to glorious life.



The figure of the beautiful Yamato-class battleship *Musashi* has her posing with a full selection of weaponry. Specifically, she's outfitted with three 46-centimeter three-barrel turrets and four 15.5-centimeter three-barrel turrets, all of which are individually articulated and ready to take aim. Her rigging can also be popped open on the left and right sides to create scenes never before realized in the original game.

If that's not enough hot steel, the Musashi Kai version ropes in some upgraded firepower, adding six three-barrel machine guns on her



sides and two on her back. Both figures are set to be released in June 2015, with "Musashi Heavy Armament Ver." retailing for ¥19,800 (about $167) and "Musashi Kai Heavy Armament Ver." going for ¥20,800 ($176).

Space Battleship Yamato 2199 Figure Hits the Beach

It's time for more of the ladies of *Space Battleship Yamato 2199* to enjoy some fun in the sun, as Bandai's Yamato Girls Collection of 1/8 scale figure series continues to strut its stuff. The remake of Leiji Matsumoto's classic 1974 *Yamato* series is being celebrated once more with radar operator Yuki Mori, who steps out onto the sand in a striking white bikini.







In addition to an infectiously happy pose, Yuki comes with a clear and yellow inner tube, a pair of sunglasses, and a delicious-looking ice cream cone. Pre-orders kicked off back near the beginning of December, with the figure scheduled to ship in late March 2015. If this looks like the beach beauty for you, Yuki can be yours for ¥10,638 (about $90).

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Memory 128MB - Graphics 800x600 supported - DirectX 9.0c+

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GRAPHIC CONTENT

Space Brothers

Feel so moon!



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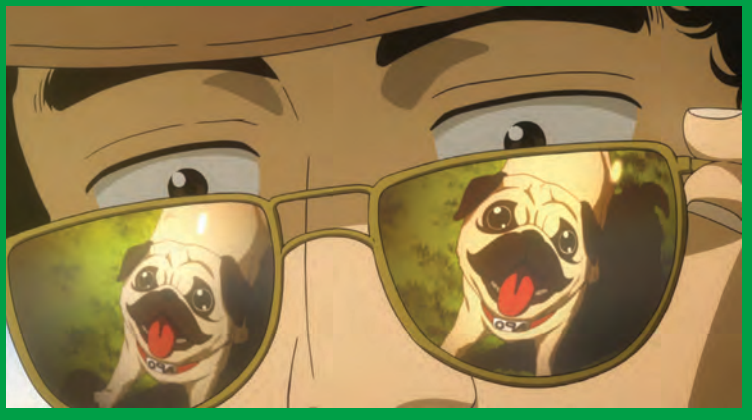
Space Brothers (*Uchuu Kyoudai*) is about a lot of things, but mostly this dramedy involves a promise between brothers as well as the internal struggles and external forces they face in pursuit of their dream. After an illuminating event one night, Mutta and his little brother Hibito decide they want to become astronauts. Flash forward 20 years or so, and Mutta (31)—born during the collective sigh of Japanese football (soccer) fans—is getting fired from his job at an automotive manufacturer while Hibitio (28)—born into the unified cheers of Japanese baseball fans—is training at NASA as a member of JAXA (Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency).

No competition is more inherent or fosters more investment in its stakes than the very lives of a pair of siblings: the older one always strives to be better, wiser for the years of advantage, while the younger constantly tries to catch up by hurdling pedestaled benchmarks. At some point, Hibito managed to clear Mutta's stupendous 'fro. After a little kindly intervening by Hibito and his mother, Mutta decides to catch up and take the lead to become a true older brother once again. From there, the story takes place on two fronts. Mutta struggles to shake a reputation perpetuated by his vindictive former employer as he applies to JAXA, while Hibito trains for a lunar mission.

As a mirror, *Space Brothers* will make you laugh in humility at every triviality that defines humanity, dance a jig in your head for every fictional accomplishment, and clutch your wrenching stomach for all your empathetic anxiety. The masterfully built dramatic tension results directly from how much you side with the underdog, how much you want to see these brothers succeed, because of how much you've been made to care about them. What helps make that possible is a fictitious world populated with people you know. While not real in the obvious sense, Mutta and Hibito's parents most likely resemble either your own or those of a friend, and same thing goes for characters occupying roles as extended/adopted family, coworkers, fellow students, neighbors, etc. A more realistic world lets you accept and believe the lie very quickly, and the same goes for the science.



©Chuya Koyama,Kodansha/TV A-1 Pictures





Set in the very near future of 2025, *Space Brothers* is technically science fiction but is not the hard-core sci fi most imagine when that genre's mentioned. The showcased technology consists of tweaks, minor imaginable improvements, on select gadgets we already know of/use; landmark buildings are rendered with loving detail; and the show further grounds a fictionalized reality by including real astronauts among the large cast of characters. (Akihiko Hoshide dubbed his animated self ... while in space on the ISS!) It should also be noted that the real NASA and JAXA actually provided support, to one end or another, for this series. The end effect of all these things is an experience that seems like a better today.

With direction by Ayumu Watanbe and animation by A-1 Pictures, this series adapts Chuuya Koyama's seinen manga (available on crunchyroll.com). While the manga is relatively easy to rush through, the pacing of the anime seems perfect. The amount of time spent in each scene seems meticulously metered to complement the intended tone. Whether dealing with waiting for a test score or foiling a robbery, the execution makes the audience experience everything dramatically. Visually, the show is luscious and has lots of fun with juxtapositions and fades. There's also great use of visual storytelling and metaphor for those with a keen eye, and the OP to the first 13 episodes (available via Sentai Filmworks) is one of my favorites for its blend of playful, surreal, and dreamlike images as well as Unicorn's invigorated, inspirational "Feel So Moon" tune.

There's a ton more in store for Mutta and Hibito. The anime ran for two years yet flew by week to week. Strap yourself in. **Recommended**.

- Ink

Patlabor—The New Files: Complete Collection

The ideal proof of "anime as a medium"



STUDIO/COMPANY
Maiden Japan

AVAILABLE
Now

RATING
Not Rated

In a future "10 years from now" when "now" was "the late 1980s/early 1990s" such that nobody has mobile phones and everyone still watches VHS tapes, pilotable robots have been adopted for construction labor and thusly branded "Labors." But accidents happen, and due to the capabilities of Labors they can be used for criminal activity. That's why you need a division of the police force equipped with custom Patrol Labors, or Patlabors for short—oh, who am I kidding? You probably didn't even read this far unless you were already a fan because I said the word "robots."

I sprang at the chance to tell everyone that *Patlabor: The New Files* best embodies what makes the series so great even 25 years later, and that Maiden Japan's Blu-ray release looks fantastic. Except then it dawned on me: "25 years." I've spent decades praising *Patlabor,* yet nobody in the US cares. Whatever the current trend of the era is, *Patlabor* doesn't fit the bill. Not sexy enough, violent enough, cute enough, realistic or fantastic enough. And yeah, there are robots. Sure, you can say "the majority of *The New Files* has barely anything to do with robots and this show is upbeat, not dour" as my *Patlabor* article on the *Otaku USA* website from about five years ago did. But nobody reads that far. I want to be wrong though, so I'll pretend:







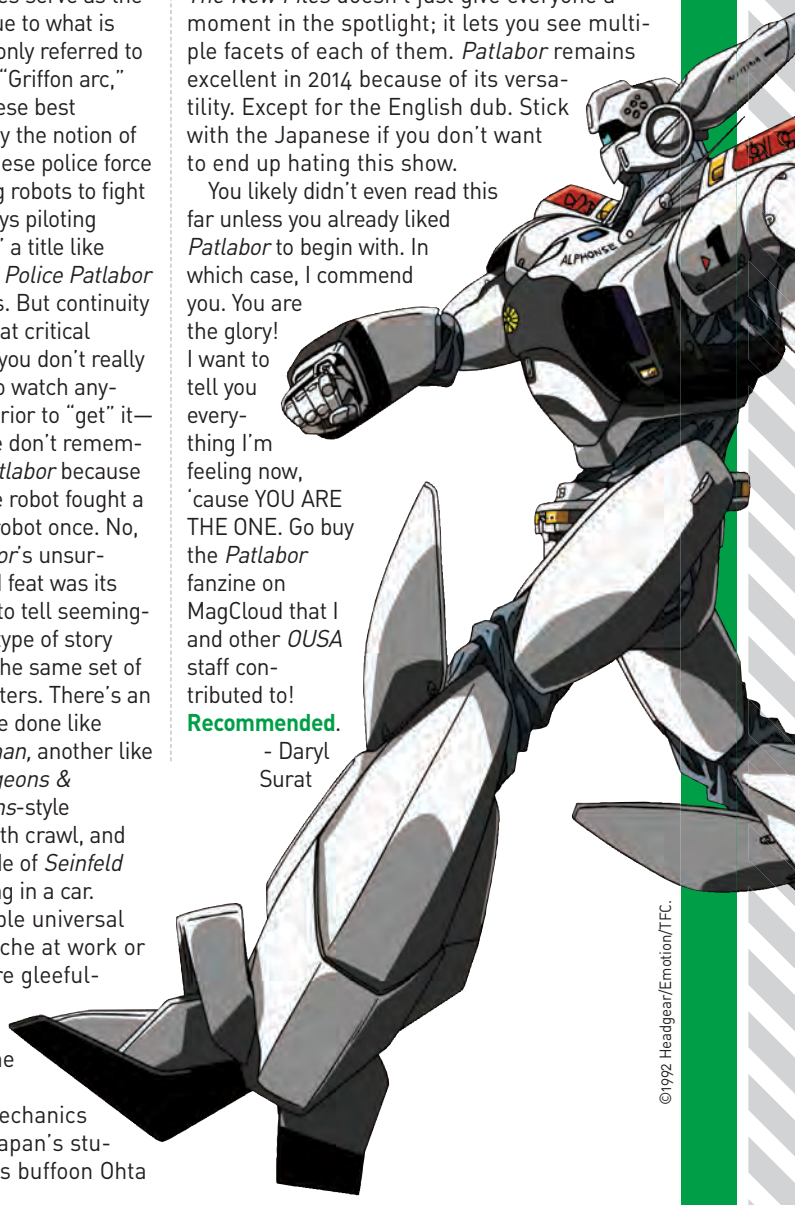
What we refer to in the US as *The New Files* is 16 direct-to-video TV episode-length stories that are slightly higher in budget and audacity than the television series that it shares continuity with. Four episodes serve as the epilogue to what is commonly referred to as the "Griffon arc," and these best embody the notion of "Japanese police force piloting robots to fight bad guys piloting robots" a title like *Mobile Police Patlabor* implies. But continuity isn't that critical here—you don't really need to watch anything prior to "get" it—and we don't remember *Patlabor* because a white robot fought a black robot once. No, *Patlabor*'s unsurpassed feat was its ability to tell seemingly any type of story using the same set of characters. There's an episode done like *Ultraman,* another like a *Dungeons & Dragons*-style labyrinth crawl, and one that may as well be an episode of *Seinfeld* since half of it is two people talking in a car.

Some episodes are about simple universal experiences like having a toothache at work or taking care of a kitten. Others are gleefully nuts. A bomber is hiding out in a public bath, with the only physical description being that he has moles under his armpit. Pornography is banned in the mechanics garage, resulting in a satire of Japan's student protests of the 1960s. Series buffoon Ohta awakens with amnesia, and in his quest to regain his identity learns that he once beat up a guy who thought he'd show everyone how tough he was by eating cold noodles in winter. These are not the "anime plotlines and jokes" you've become accustomed to. One of the most memorable episodes for me is "Snow Rondo," a quiet and personal story that's a little surreal with a touch of romance.

Don't get me wrong: the movies are phenomenal (the third is just "pretty good" by virtue of it not originally being written as a *Patlabor* entry), but they're primarily dramatic in nature and only focus on a few characters. *The New Files* doesn't just give everyone a moment in the spotlight; it lets you see multiple facets of each of them. *Patlabor* remains excellent in 2014 because of its versatility. Except for the English dub. Stick with the Japanese if you don't want to end up hating this show.

You likely didn't even read this far unless you already liked *Patlabor* to begin with. In which case, I commend you. You are the glory! I want to tell you everything I'm feeling now, 'cause YOU ARE THE ONE. Go buy the *Patlabor* fanzine on MagCloud that I and other *OUSA* staff contributed to! **Recommended.**

- Daryl Surat



©1992 Headgear/Emotion/TFC.

Hi-sCool! SeHa Girls

Sega's greatest triumph since *Segata Sanshiro*



STUDIO/COMPANY
Crunchyroll

AVAILABLE
Now

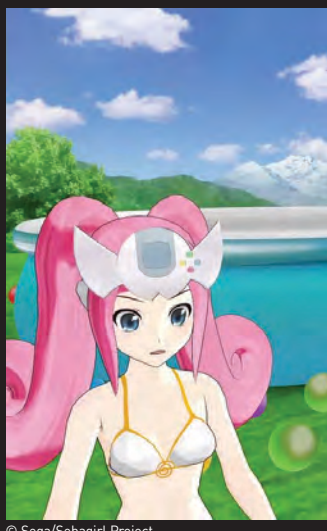
RATING
Not Rated

As a lifelong Nintendo kid, I rejoiced when Sega abandoned making home consoles at the cusp of the 21st century. But for all the kids whose parents never truly loved them, as evidenced by their getting Master System or Genesis instead of NES or SNES, it was devastating. Years later when KEI, the artist responsible for designing the Hatsune Miku Vocaloid, created similarly styled cute girl anthropomorphisms of the various Sega hardware throughout the years, they caught on. Childhood nostalgia is a powerful thing; people continue to buy *Sonic the Hedgehog* games, after all! The "Sega Hard Girls," or "SeHa Girls" for short, now appear in various media, so when an anime series was announced with the premise being that they'd be in high school and it'd be CG animated, I brushed it off at first as my Nintendo loyalties demanded. I thought to myself, "The only way I'd ever watch that is if they made it exactly like *gdgd Fairies*, only with Sega jokes instead of magic jokes!"

They did exactly that. For *Hi-sCool! SeHa Girls* is the latest from Sota Sugahara, one of the key architects behind the pinnacle of comedy that is *gdgd Fairies*. At this point I'll gladly watch every low-budget CG anime done in MikuMikuDance where a trio of girls have bizarre arguments in the face of progressive absurdity wrought through imported character models from other stuff, and *SeHa Girls* is the next in succession. At the tongue-twistingly named Sehagaga Academy (located exactly where Sega's Tokyo HQ is on Google Maps), an institution where the only way to graduate is to earn 100 credit medals through various Sega-related hijinks, there seem to be only three students: the cheerful yet naïve Dreamcast, the often exasperated Saturn, and the shy yet brainy Mega Drive. Mega Drive's demeanor may seem a radical departure from America's perception of the system brashly marketed as "Genesis does what







© Sega/Sehagirl Project

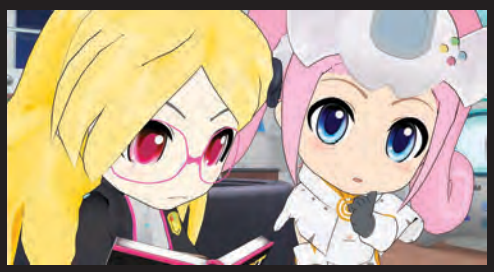




NintenDON'T" but there's an entirely separate *SeHa Girl* for the Genesis. Like every Japanese character designer's vision of an "American girl," Genesis is a busty blonde-haired and blue-eyed cowgirl wearing an American flag bikini top. Perhaps they'll add her should this be popular enough to merit another season.

Most storylines take two episodes, but each episode is only about 10 minutes long not counting the credits.

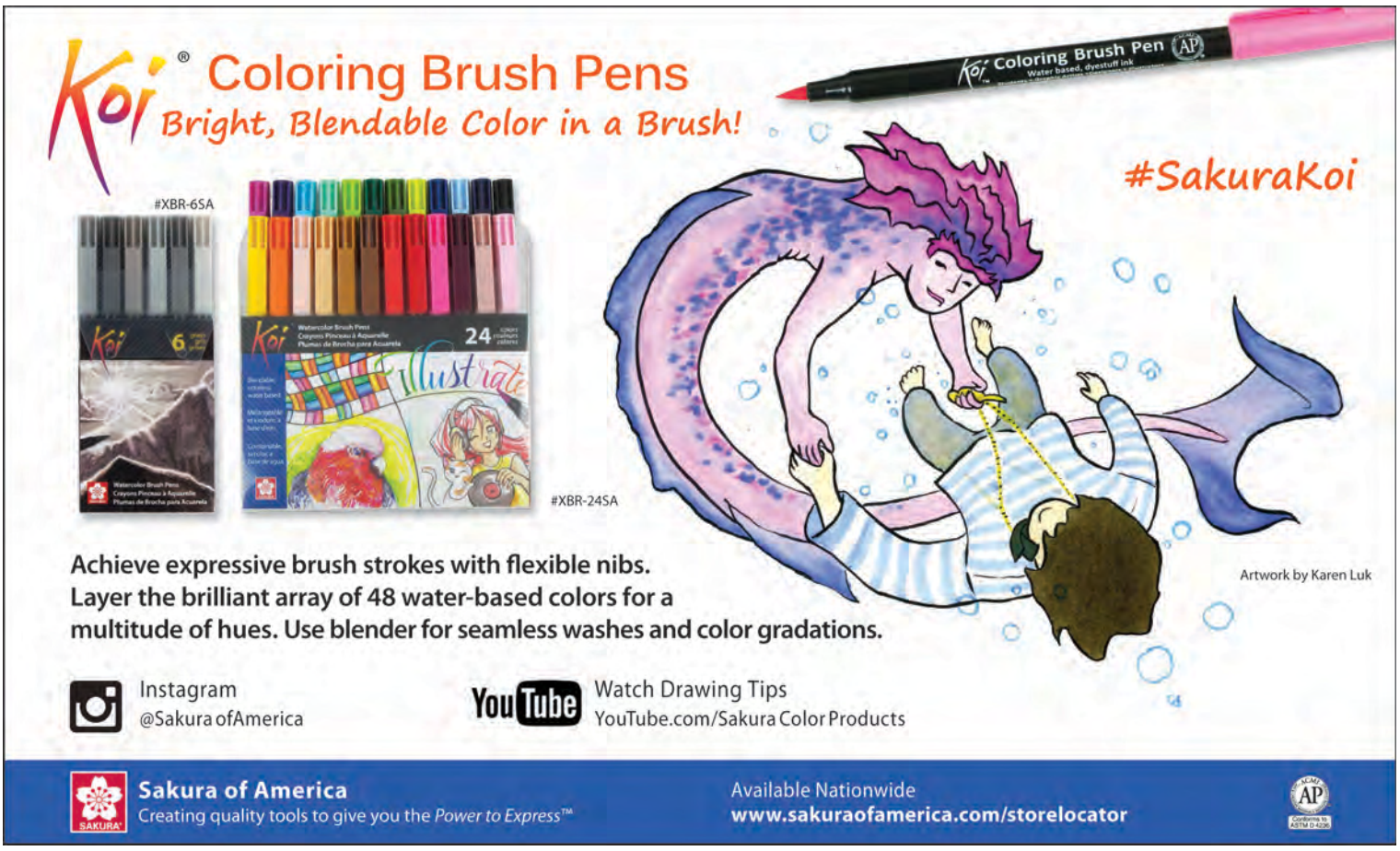




Typically the SeHa Girls get into some sort of bizarre discussion possibly pertaining to video games before being given an assignment to enter the world of a particular Sega game and complete a challenge. Invariably, things go haywire as characters from other Sega games intervene, the gameplay isn't quite 100% faithful to the original, and the characters exhibit personality traits representative of their respective hardware's quirks. The exaggerated difficulties and irritations they encounter while playing mirror our own. It's true that you don't get much health in *Virtua Fighter* because rudimentary one-button combos do outlandish damage. Piloting those robots in arena battles is indeed tough because you often accidentally jump or attack when you're trying to do something else. And before you ask, they absolutely cross paths with Sonic the Hedgehog, but that episode is devoid of the humor and hardcore gaming nerdery that define the rest.

Diehard Sega otaku will appreciate all the obscure references sprinkled through the sound effects, background details, and the like. Those are undeniably courtesy of screenwriter Masayuki Kibe; yep, retro gaming aficionado and Sega super-nerd "Kibe-kun" from *Game Center CX* himself! But the beauty of this series is that the comedy isn't reliant upon the references. They're just icing on the cake. So even if you're like me, a guy who thinks even the Genesis-era *Sonic* games are no good compared to *Mario* and declared *Space Channel 5* a waste of time before even completing the first level, *Hi-sCool! SeHa Girls* is a celebration. By the time you read this it should all be streaming on Crunchyroll, so go experience it for yourself. You'll know within the first two episodes if it's for you. (Just don't watch the Sonic episode first.)

- Daryl Surat



Parasyte: The Maxim

This right hand of mine burns with an awesome power



STUDIO/COMPANY
Crunchyroll

AVAILABLE
Now

RATING
Not Rated

Twenty years ago when manga translated into English was scarce, everybody leapt at the opportunity to buy Tokyopop's manga anthology *Mixxzine*. It had *Sailor Moon* and *Magic Knight Rayearth*, after all. But running alongside these titans of shojo were some seinen works with much more graphic content. The standout was *Kiseiju* ("parasite"), which was renamed to the trademark-able *Parasyte*. *Mixxzine* may be long gone but the series' popularity (and English title) lived on, leading to multiple rereleases with unaltered character names and artwork. After all these years, it's even gotten some recent live-action Japanese film adaptations (eh...) as well as this TV series.

Unbeknownst to the general public, seemingly extraterrestrial creatures resembling snakes descend upon the world, capable of burrowing into the brains of unsuspecting victims, killing them instantly, and assuming control over the now-dead bodies with grotesque results that suggest the author, Hitoshi Iwaaki, is a fan of David Cronenberg and John Carpenter films. The bodies of these parasitically controlled hosts can then morph and twist into other matter while exerting superhuman strength and speed—abilities used primarily to murder and eat other people. Nerdy high school student







Based on the manga "Parasyte" by Hitoshi Iwaaki, originally serialized in "Afternoon" by KODANSHA LTD. ©Hitoshi Iwaaki/ KODANSHA LTD. ©NTV/VAP/4cast

Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade

Can a beast find happiness in the guise of a human being?



STUDIO/COMPANY
Discotek Media

AVAILABLE
Now

RATING
Not Rated

In an alternate history, after Japan emerged from the post-Occupation period, widespread civil unrest led to the militarization of the police force, especially the heavily armed Capitol Police Special Unit known as the Kerberos squad. Equipped with intimidating body armor and massive machine guns, the Kerberos troopers wage war against terrorist cells and antigovernment guerrillas. But the Capitol Police Special Unit is increasingly under fire as public opinion slowly turns against them, and political infighting threatens to render Kerberos extinct. This is the world of *Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade*, the third film in Mamoru Oshii's "Kerberos Panzer Cop" trilogy.

Jin-Roh examines the perils of Kazuki Fuse, a rookie with the Capitol Police Special Unit. When Fuse confronts a young woman transporting a bomb intended for a terrorist attack, the girl detonates the device, killing herself in front of the stunned trooper. Although Fuse survives the blast thanks to his armor, an internal investigation of the incident finds fault with his behavior, and he's busted back to the Academy for training and reevaluation. Guilt-ridden and plagued by nightmares, Fuse visits the deceased girl's grave where he encounters her elder sister, Kei. Soon the shell-shocked Fuse and the mysterious Kei embark on a romantic relationship, but this fateful meeting is merely the prelude to a series of intrigues that threaten to destroy Fuse and the Kerberos squad with him. Who is the hunter? Who is the prey? And can a beast find happiness in the guise of a human being?





Directed by Hiroyuki Okiura with a screenplay by Mamoru Oshii, *Jin-Roh* is one part political thriller, one part allegory, and one part action movie. The film is defined by its methodical pace and its excellent attention to detail. In *Jin-Roh*, Okiura demonstrates the same animation skills and dedication to realism that helped make the *Ghost in the Shell* films—on which he served as character designer and animation supervisor—remarkable. Some viewers may consider the protagonist, Fuse, to be cold or unemotional, but I think his relative detachment makes the conclusion of the film, where Fuse





Shinichi Izumi would have been one such victim, though due to sheer luck he manages to prevent the would-be body snatcher from invading his head. It instead tunnels into his right hand, which sprouts eyes and a mouth among other hideous forms as it gains sentience. The creature, which Shinichi names "Migi" (Japanese for "right"), has little recollection of its past and is utterly sociopathic in the way that all the popular television show protagonists are nowadays. Still, if Shinichi dies then Migi dies, and that is not at all in Migi's self-interest. If they want to stay alive and figure out what's going on, their relationship will have to become symbiotic. Easier said than done: Shinichi has to keep his condition a secret lest he be blamed for the murderous deeds of the other parasites out there, who are alerted to his nearby presence and move to kill him immediately!

Incorporating aspects of the superhero tale, horror, science fiction, action, romance, mystery, and a surprising amount of comedy given the death toll, *Parasyte: The Maxim* is a strong candidate for the best anime of the current season. Anime studio Madhouse is typically known for extremely faithful adaptations of manga, but the original *Parasyte* came out in the late 1980s and was set in the then-modern day. Times have changed. We have smartphones and tablet PCs now. Forget about search engines and broadband, the World Wide Web portion of the Internet (which we now think of as the entirety of "the Internet") didn't even exist then. Some modernizations were in order to create *The Maxim.* All of the character designs were drastically overhauled to look more contemporary, and the plot revelations have been rearranged and sped up to account for a world of instantaneous communication and knowledge retrieval. With a planned 24 episodes to cover 10 volumes of manga, it's a credit to relative newcomer director Kenichi Shimizu that at no point does the story meander thus far. In fact, many of the episodes end on COLOSSAL cliffhangers.

One thing that hasn't changed much from the manga is the relationship dynamic between Shinichi and Migi, which remains compelling to this day. Sure, it's expected that Migi becomes more caring over time, even though his cold analytics in pointing out humanity's hypocrisies have a degree of truth. Slowly but surely, Shinichi seems to grow more coldhearted toward those around him. Who's changing who? Also like the manga, *Parasyte: The Maxim* gets rather gruesome what with the preferred killing method of the parasites being to split apart at the head, form into blades, and whip at high velocity into their victims. As was then and is now, the full effect of these "mincemeat murders" is best experienced when you watch *Parasyte: The Maxim* right after *Sailor Moon*!

- Daryl Surat



© Bandai Visual, Production I.G.





must make a terrible choice, all the more emotionally resonant.

My only complaint with *Jin-Roh* is a stylistic one: I wish that the allusions to the story of "Le Petit Chaperon Rouge"—the unexpurgated version of the Little Red Riding Hood story which concludes quite poorly for the heroine—had been less overt. It's okay to dress a young terrorist transporting bombs in a bright red jacket. It's fine to pose the protagonist in front of the wolf display at the natural history museum. These are both visual cues, and since film is a visual medium, the deployment of these images is either forgivable or necessary, depending on the viewer's taste. But it's a different matter to explicitly refer to the terrorist couriers as "Little Red Riding Hoods" or to have Kei present Fuse with a copy of the Little Red Riding Hood storybook, or to quote the entire fairy tale in lines of dialogue throughout the film. Perhaps this critique is unfair. Expecting the average Japanese filmgoer to be fluent in European fairy tales is like expecting the average American to be familiar with "The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter" or "Urashima Taro," so the symbolism needs to be explicit. Even Mamoru Oshii, a master of visual symbolism, has been guilty of clobbering his audience over the head with the occasional lump of ponderous exposition, but still I wish that Okiura had allowed silence to speak a little louder in his film.

Quibbles aside, it's encouraging that Discotek Media has rescued the license to *Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade.* The original Bandai Entertainment DVD release is long out of print, and Discotek's Blu-ray release will mark the first time that *Jin-Roh* will see a high definition home video release in the United States. This is excellent news, because this tale of wolves and men deserves to be remembered as an outstanding example of mature storytelling in an animated medium.

- Paul Thomas Chapman

Hozuki no Reitetsu

Humor thick with irony and well mixed with the absurd



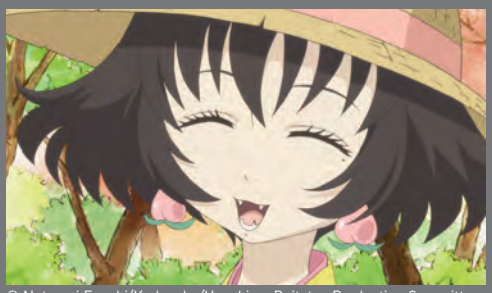
STUDIO/COMPANY
Sentai Filmworks

AVAILABLE
Now

RATING
Not Rated

Heaven and hell really do exist! But since the postwar population growth has been steadily providing hell with an absolute glut of souls, Great King Enma, Judge of the Afterlife, has to rely heavily on his right-hand ~~man~~ ogre/demon. That aide (Chief Secretary/Chief of Staff) is the spiked iron club-wielding Hozuki, the only being with the right blend of diligence, strength, and apathy needed to manage the minions manning the myriad operations of The Eight Greater Hells and The Eight Cold Hells (which are further divided into 272 subdivisions of various nefariousnesses).

While based on Natsumi Eguchi's manga, *Hozuki no Reitetsu* (which translates as *Hozuki's Coolheadedness*) is a Seinfeld affair: a comedy essentially about nothing. The 13, two-part episodes comprising this series concern the disparate duties within the day-to-day life of a figure in middle management who's more capable than his superior but content with being the orchestrator rather than the figurehead. That may seem rather dry, and it is, but the fact that it takes place in hell affords many opportunities for laughs throughout.





© Natsumi Eguchi/Kodansha/Hozuki no Reitetsu Production Committee



On whole, the show leverages a sense of humor thick with irony and well mixed with the absurd, the sophomoric, and the just plain goofy. Each episode is packed with jokes and puns geared toward a Japanese audience (duh), so punchlines can go over the heads of foreign









viewers unacquainted with certain names and nouns and their cultural context. The writing and situational humor will not leave an unfamiliar audience in the dark, but watching becomes more fun with every name and noun you Google. Even at face value there are plenty of yuks to be had, and there can be so much going on in certain scenes that revisiting episodes reveals all the more to appreciate.

Absolutely nothing is needed to admire the character designs or the art of hell itself. Whether it's a pan over a matte death scroll, watercolor backgrounds, a CG field of goldfish plants (you heard me), or the settings used to depict the various hells, the animation (Wit Studio) and art combine to offer a unique and endearing sense of otherworldliness. This is furthered by the monsters and demons and mythological figures that, much like those in *Nura: Rise of the Yokai Clan*, provide a diverse and interesting well from which to draw. And when you consider the additional appearances and interpretations of figures from Chinese and Western folklore as well, there's always something interesting to be seen on screen.

Within the series, Earth is referred to as the mundane world, but that's exactly what *Hozuki's Coolheadedness* shows us of such a supernatural (albeit horrific) wonderland as hell. Settings change, but the bosses are still morons and the minions are hapless without constant supervision. The parallel is a simple one, perhaps meant to offer sympathetic comfort or provide an escapist power fantasy for burdened salarymen. Either way, there are far worse workplace comedies. For all the implications they could carry, each segment really only exists to chain together jokes with great abandon and frivolity.

This series won't be for everyone. When it aired, it split people in the same way *Polar Bear's Café* did. It's a meandering show with not much else on its to-do list other than play around with the characters it has and see what happens given X situation. To me, that works. It works heartily. Marathoning more than a few episodes could get droll, but popping in an episode or two at a time is definitely worthwhile. To find out whether this show's for you, watch the OP, which features just about all the art styles blended into one heck of an ensemble introduction and the joyous "Jigoku no Sata mo Kimi Shidai" (You Also Dictate Hell's Judgment) by Jigoku no Sata All Stars. If you don't find yourself smiling or at least interested, stop there. Otherwise, venture a couple episodes. Then venture some more.

- Ink



Love and Apocalypse

Special all-tentacle edition!



Magical Girl Apocalypse © K. SATO 2013

Magical Girl Apocalypse

"Every dead body that is not exterminated becomes one of them, it gets up and kills, the people it kills get up and kill!"

—*Dawn of the Dead* (1978)



PUBLISHER
Viz

ORIGINAL NOVEL
Hiroshi Sakurazaka

STORYBOARDS
Ryosuke Takeuchi

ART
Takeshi Obata

RATING
16+

Kii Kogami is an apathetic high school student just hoping to get through another boring day. His expectations are shattered when a strange little girl in a Gothic Lolita costume strolls through the front gates of the school, carrying an iron ball on a cane, and smashes his teacher's head into pulp. In instants, the dead-eyed monster girl has turned his classroom into a bloodbath ... and mere seconds later, the corpses of his slaughtered classmates rise again, as super-strong, running zombies, mindlessly droning "Magical ..." as they tear the living apart. And in the crowning horror, the zombies' clothes transform into black Goth-Loli dresses! Kii manages to flee outside with a handful of survivors, chief among them shy, picked-upon Tsukune ("You came back ... to save someone like me ..."). But even as they escape the school, a giant pentagram appears in the sky, and thousands of Magical Girls pour forth to wipe out every living soul in Japan ... or the world ...

"Goddamit!! What the f*'s happening to Japan?! What are all these monster girls doing here?!"**

If *Madoka Magica* is the 2010's emo, "mature," *Watchmen*-style take on the magical girl genre, *Magical Girl Apocalypse* is its gory-variant-cover, back-pages-of-*Previews,* monstrous inbred cousin. Drawn in the for-kids-in-name-only magazine *Weekly Shonen Champion,* this ultraviolent end-of-the-world story wastes zero time before getting to the goods, delighting in setting up characters as if they'll be important and then killing them pages later, wading in blood and meat-grinder nihilism. In short, it's exactly what you want in an apocalyptic gorefest. Some of the other fanservice on display is more cynical, chiefly the fact that every major female character either looks 10 years old or has gigantic breasts that make *Highschool of the Dead* look realistic. A rapist villain among the survivors feels more offensive and tacky than any number of exploding craniums. But despite the ugly mood and frequently ugly art, there's real imagination on display here, a page-turner that continually surprises with escalating grossness and mocks every notion of manga heroism. Don't say I didn't warn you, but this is **recommended**. (Jason Bradley Thompson)



PUBLISHER
Viz

STORY AND ART
Yusei Matsui

RATING
16+

Assassination Classroom

At Kunigigaoka High School, Class 3-E, the students start every day by trying to kill their teacher. They haven't succeeded so far: their homeroom teacher is a tentacled monster, a Cthulhoid (alien?) entity so powerful it ripped a hole in the moon, a giant super-octopus with a perpet-



Assassination Classroom ©2012 Yusei Matsui/SHUEISHA Inc.

sensei has promised to destroy Earth in one year, but until then, in fulfillment of another promise, he's volunteered to teach one of Japan's most notorious junior high classes. Japan's Ministry of Defense (whose agent works as the PE teacher) appeals to the unlucky class: destroy their teacher and save the world ... and if that's not enough incentive, they'll give a cool 10 billion yen ($100 million) to whoever lands the killing blow! But sadly for the students, Koro-sensei can move at Mach 20, he regenerates, his tentacles can crush steel, and he won't let bombs, guns, or knives keep him from molding his students into brilliant, upstanding human beings. ("I want you to assassinate me with a method that brings a smile to your face, one that you can take pride in!") Will Koro-sensei teach his class about the joys of learning, just in time for him to blow up the planet? Can Nagisa, our adorable, androgynous-looking protagonist, put a cap in the *** of the most amazing teacher who ever lived? Don't bring any ammunition unless you have enough for the whole class!

The first obvious thing about *Assassination Classroom* is how compromised it must have been from its original idea: why, if not to assuage media critics, is it so careful to show that the children are only firing harmless airsoft guns at their monster teacher, are only stabbing him with rubber knives? (Special anti-monster BBs and rubber knives, but still.) But in Japan, where teachers are much more involved in their students' lives, the theme of student-teacher violence is a powerful one—think *Battle Royale*—and Yusei Matsui's over-the-top black comedy plays enjoyably with these ideas of youth, rebellion, and authority even if no one actually dies. Like a tentacled guidance counselor, Koro-sensei solves his students' problems one by one, even the real troublemakers like Karma, a sociopath who threatens a classmate with a broken bottle in the only truly violent moment in the first volume. It's heart-warming *Shonen Jump* fare ("Abandoning you is not an option!") but with enough of a wink to please cynics; there are lots of weird images to gape at and great slapstick involving Koro-sensei's awe-inspiring speed. And if you wonder how they can keep up the originality for multiple volumes ... well, there's only one way to find out, right? The big question, of course, is "Does it ever become a fighting manga?"

Recommended. (Jason Bradley Thompson)

Prophecy

YouTube videos are uploaded showing a non-descript man with a mask cut out of newspaper sitting in a cardboard box. In each video he names a target, someone familiar to his Internet viewers, and every time his "punishment" comes true: an abusive restaurant worker is force-fed cockroaches, an interviewer who publicly mocked a job applicant is beaten on camera, a company with unethical practices is burned to the ground. As 2chan posters and Facebook commenters speculate about the identity of the mysterious "Paperboy"—is he a single person or a mob of loosely linked copycats like Anonymous?—his crimes attract the attention of the Tokyo police's recently formed Anti Cyber Crimes Division. Erika Yoshino, a 26-year-old, takes-no-crap lieutenant, tries to put together the evidence and outwit Paperboy, but what really worries her is Paperboy's growing fan base, as people on Twitter and messageboards start to sympathize with his crowd-pleasing crimes. ("They don't care a whit about justice or the law. They're the walking personification of mob mentality.") Soon, Paperboy's "punishment" escalates to murder, and the hit counters go wild ...

"Here's my warning for tomorrow."
"The target this time is..."

A fascinating, timely manga, *Prophecy* resembles *Death Note* in both its detective-vs.-criminal cat-and-mouse game and its antihero driven by the desire to punish criminals and cleanse the world. However, unlike *Death Note* (and unlike most modern manga where the protagonists' deepest financial concern is being able to afford porno dojinshi), *Prophecy* pays surprising attention to economic injustice; in this manga, social problems aren't just something involving upset bourgeois hashtag activists, but a matter of life and death for Japan's marginalized and impoverished under class. Overworked and abused tech temps, day laborers, foreign immigrants in Japan, all get a voice in this story, where the rage of a thousand slights and injustices finds its incarnation in the Internet activist/terrorist. ("So some fat pigs could get even fatter.... That was the reason years of our lives were being shaved off ...") The compelling characters that draw you through the maze of gray morality, the believable technological details (even if it occasionally errs toward overexplaining), and Tetsuya Tsutsui's dark (but not

PUBLISHER
Vertical

STORY AND ART
Tetsuya Tsutsui

RATING
Unrated/16+



Prophecy © Tetsuya Tsutsui/Ki-oon

nihilistically dark!) vision of society, all make this the perfect manga for the age when "doxxing" and "online lynching" are household words. **Recommended**. (Jason Bradley Thompson)



PUBLISHER
Viz

STORY AND ART
Aya Shouto

RATING
13+

Kiss of the Rose Princess

Who knew a necklace could be such a burden on a girl's life? "Thanks to this thing," Anise thinks of the rose choker her absent father requires her to wear, "the dress code enforcer is always after me! Even the girl gangs pick on me. If this necklace is really supposed to protect me, why isn't my life more peaceful?!" Yet she has to wear it because her father has threatened her with terrible punishment if she ever takes her collar off. If this setup seems simultaneously flimsy, convoluted, and strangely kinky for a manga where the main character is a bobble-headed schoolgirl with pink hair, it's just the beginning. (Then again, *Revolutionary Girl Utena* had pink hair, and she was a superfreak. The kind you don't bring home to mother.)

Anise loses the choker and simultaneously learns that she's the Rose Princess, with four handsome knights bound to her and required to obey her commands. By amazing manga coincidence, they happen to be the four most popular boys at her school, and also fall into readily identifiable bishonen love interest categories. Tenjo, the White Knight, is the wholesome class president all the girls swoon over. Kurama, the Black Knight, is a goth-y "night stalker" with a chip on his shoulder. Seiran, the Blue Knight, is the cute little shota of the group. And Kaede, the Red Knight, is Anise's tsundere childhood friend and designated primary love interest.

Together, they're a formidable force against threats to the Rose Princess. But there isn't much around to threaten her, so they spend most of their time using their vaguely defined powers on quests like checking junk shops for Anise's lost choker or helping with the decorations at the school festival. It feels like the manga is killing time until someone at *Monthly Asuka* magazine makes artist Aya Shouto commit to a plot. Meanwhile, she tosses in miscellaneous fantasy elements—the Knights, the necklace, magic cards, a cute little bat-winged sidekick—as if hoping one of them will turn out to be interesting enough to develop.

Kiss of the Rose Princess is a pleasant manga to look at. The characters are drawn in a generic anime-ready style, all big eyes and pointy hair, but the action is lively. Shouto stuffs the pages with flying rose petals and snazzy magic effects. But as of Volume 1 there's no strong plot thread to get invested in, and the miniquests are off-the-shelf manga standards: lovestruck girls chasing the class president, school festival preparations. If there isn't a class trip by Volume 3, I'll eat my *Card Captor Sakura* body pillow. It's not without its charms, mainly in the cute artwork, but I'd kind of prefer a manga following the adventures of Anise's creepy dad. (Shaenon K. Garrity)



Lucifer and the Biscuit Hammer

A friend of mine once said, "Nerdy women like fantasy guys with emotional problems. Nerdy guys like fantasy women who are strong enough to kill them." According to this theory, everyone gets something they like in *Lucifer and the Biscuit Hammer*, a sweet and sad tale of casual apocalypse, secret magic, and adolescent angst.



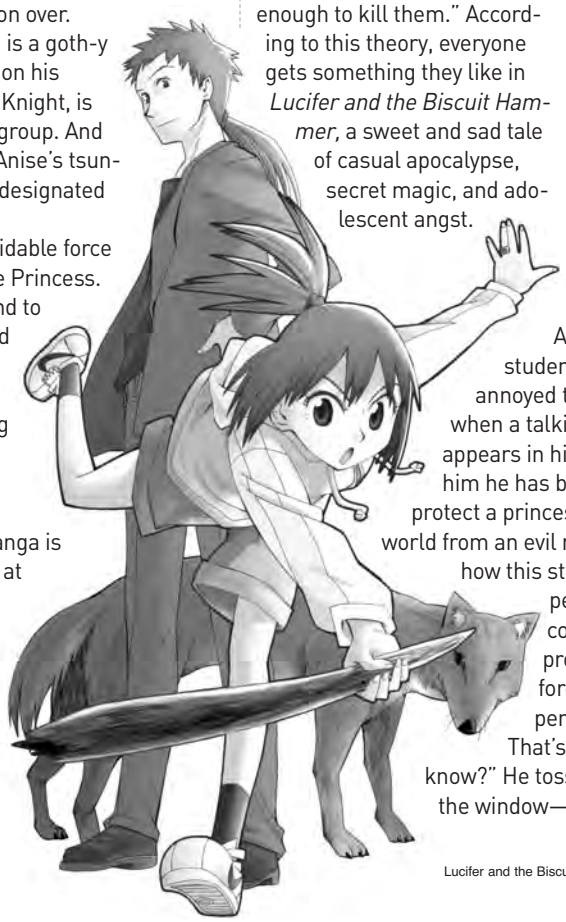
PUBLISHER
Seven Seas

STORY AND ART
Satoshi Mizukami

RATING
13+

Apathetic college student Yuuhi is more annoyed than startled when a talking lizard appears in his room, telling him he has been chosen to protect a princess and save the world from an evil mage. "I know how this story goes. Two people's paths converge, and the protagonist gets forced into the other person's lifestyle. That's no good, you know?" He tosses the lizard out the window—but once he actually meets the "princess," his cheerful next door neighbor Samidare, he changes his tune and swears devotion as her faithful knight. She's his Magical Pixie Dream Supergirl, a Haruhi-esque amazing maniac who can crush a monster with one kick (exposing her panties in the process, of course), and he's more in awe than in love: "She's so beautiful ... I can hardly wrap my head around the fact that I serve someone so incredible...!" But to say she shatters Yuuhi's cynicism wouldn't be true, because what attracts him to her is that they both share a deep pessimism and she has big plans for the world: to destroy it. Fighting a succession of golems sent by the mysterious mage, Yuuhi vows to become stronger so that he can help his wicked Lucifer princess. Every beautiful summer day, every one of Samidare's smiles, brings them closer to their secret goal of which even the lizard doesn't approve ... to end all suffering and hypocrisy by wiping out humanity forever.

It sounds dark, but reading *Lucifer and the Biscuit Hammer* confirms what the breezy art already suggests: this story balances light and heavy as deftly as the doomsday weapon of the title, a massive hammer poised in space over Earth that only our antiheroes can see. Samidare and Amamiya are both a little sociopathic, damaged by their troubled pasts; that this is revealed in a way that seems subtle and unforced, rather than the typical *Shonen Jump* hyper-emotionality where Naruto cries three times in every chapter,



Lucifer and the Biscuit Hammer © Satoshi Mizukami 2006

is a testament to Satoshi Mizukami's storytelling. As a succession of parent and older sibling figures (such as Samidare's sister, a college prof) come into the story, a theme develops of youth vs. adulthood: the idea that growing up is inconceivable, that ending the world might be better than growing up and facing the unknown. All this is expressed through much sitting on the archetypal grassy Japanese riverbanks, sharing meals in apartments, love comedy, and some well-handled fight scenes with silent, bug-eyed monsters. Done wrong, this could be just another manga with a long buildup to nothing, but Mizukami's elegant handling of YA themes encourages me, like Yuuhi, to follow it anywhere. **Recommended**. (Jason Bradley Thompson)



PUBLISHER
Viz

STORY AND ART
Chika Shiomi

RATING
13+

Yukarism

Chika Shiomi's manga oeuvre consists mostly of PG-rated paranormal romances in school settings (*Yurara, Rasetsu, Night of the Beasts,* etc.), but *Yukarism* dips its toes into a different world, the "floating world," aka the early 1800s of Japan's Edo period. Twenty-first century high school student Yukari is a young novelist haunted by ghostly memories of the the pleasure districts of old Japan ("That time and place ... Yoshiwara in Edo 200 years ago ... it's as if a faint memory of the distant past exists within me ..."). When Mahoro Tachibana, a fan of the elegant historical world of his books, meets him in school one day, she's instantly starstruck, but Yukari feels something more: the sensation that they knew one another in the past. What is their connection, and why were they both born with mysterious scars? Sure, they're obviously reincarnated, but even Yukari isn't ready for what he discovers when he has his first full-on flashback to old Edo ... SURPRISE! In their past life, Yukari was an oiran (a female courtesan), and Mahoro was a male bodyguard who worked in his brothel!

"Have you ever remembered yourself dying? I mean your death from before you were born."

Time travel and gender switching are fertile soil for manga fantasies, and Yukari's cautious optimism about the situation mirrors the reader's. ("What a strange phenomenon ... this is going to be fun!") After an initial period of surprise (and some difficulty walking in an oiran's 88 pounds of robes, decorations, and sandals), "he" gamely fits into "his" old life as a courtesan and soon starts recognizing other people who are

All You Need is Kill ©2014 Hiroshi Sakurazaka/Ryosuke Takeuchi/yoshitoshi Abe/Takeshi Obata/SHUEISHA Inc.



actually pre-incarnations of present-day friends and lovers (male and female). Soon Yukari starts flipping back and forth in time, but lighthearted love-comedy explorations are shadowed by intimations of darker secrets ... namely, the circumstances of the bloody death that caused Yukari and Mahoro to be reincarnated in the first place. Was it murder, and does the murderer threaten them in the present day?

Capably told by an old pro of shojo manga, *Yukarism*'s exotic historical elements are its strength but also its weakness; we get to see only bits of old Japan, and the bits we do see sometimes have the stilted feeling of an educational lecture. ("I'm in the middle of an oiran dochu ... an oiran procession!"). It's not surprising when Shiomi's author notes reveal that she isn't really into history and the entire premise was her editor's idea ("How about a new series that's historical? And Japanese? Maybe a man who was an oiran in a previous life?"), although since such editorial pressure isn't uncommon in manga, perhaps the admission should be seen as refreshing honesty. Nonetheless, it's a fun tale, and there's enough romantic tension and smart moments to keep you reading, from the initial gender-bending plot twist alas unavoidably spoiled in this review, to the resigned look on Yukari's face as she says, "Well, I should have known it would come to this," while looking out over a client's waiting bedchamber for the first time. (Jason Bradley Thompson)



PUBLISHER
Viz

ORIGINAL NOVEL
Hiroshi Sakurazaka

STORYBOARDS
Ryosuke Takeuchi

ART
Takeshi Obata

RATING
16+

All You Need Is Kill

All You Need Is Kill is the manga adaptation of a light novel by Hiroshi Sakurazaka. It's a military sci-fi yarn about a lowly soldier named Keiji who gets caught in a time loop where he relives the same hellish battle against an alien army over and over. The light novel is also the basis for the Tom Cruise film *Edge of Tomorrow.* That movie is a good (Americanized) reimagining, but you're better off reading Takeshi Obata's manga version—because this comic is a work of rare and ferocious beauty.

Just like in *Death Note* and *Bakuman,* Obata's

character design is pure eye candy. He likes to draw slender people with gorgeous hair, and the heroes in *Kill* are slim teenagers with perfect crowns of stylish waves and spikes. In some ways, Obata's art is repeating itself just like the story in *Kill.*

But in other ways, he's pushing himself toward bold new material. Obata's previous manga are full of people in well-tailored clothes who engage in long conversations, but with *Kill,* he turns out furious battle scenes (by the dozen!) and designs the mechanized "Jackets" that every soldier wears. The Jackets are a neat fusion of East and West: like the halfway point between that clunky armor in *Halo* and the spindly mechas in *Evangelion.*

All You Need Is Kill focuses on both the rookie Keiji and a veteran named Rita Vratasky. Rita's such a deadly warrior that everyone calls her "The Full Metal Bitch." And against all odds, she's the most feminist manga character that I've seen in years.

Seriously.

The so-called Bitch is a complicated woman who's strong in more ways than one. She's a fearsome killer and a cool-headed strategist who thrives under pressure. Keiji is surprised when he first sees Rita outside of her Jacket, because she's actually a dainty young woman. This is the first of many times when Keiji's initial take on Rita is called into question.

And just like Keiji, the reader is lucky to see many different sides of her. By turns Rita is a legendary hero, a bloodthirsty war junkie, a scared child who never grew up, and a lonely woman who tries to eat pickled plums with chopsticks that she barely knows how to use.

In any light Rita is an unforgettable character, and Obata's manga is currently the best version of *All You Need Is Kill.* **Recommended**. (Josiah Shoup)



PUBLISHER Viz
STORY AND ART Naoki Serizawa
CONCEPT Capcom
RATING 18+

Resident Evil: The Marhawa Desire

Catholic High School of the Dead! Doug Wright is a middle-aged bacteriologist teaching at a university in Singapore, while his slacker nephew, Ricky Tozawa, sleeps through classes. An urgent letter from an old friend sends Wright and Ricky to "Asia's most prestigious school," Marhawa Academy, a vaguely Catholic boarding school where the authorities are keeping a terrible secret chained up in the basement ... ZOMBIES!! Wright, being familiar with the symptoms of the T-Virus, begs the school to call in professional help, but Ricky is more interested in flirting with girls, and headmistress Mother Gracia is more concerned with protecting the school's reputation than implementing proper bioterrorism protocols. Meanwhile, in another part of the plot, B.S.A.A. (Bioterrorism Security Assessment Alliance) agents Piers, Merah and multiple-*Resident Evil*-games veteran Chris Redfield (looking like a young David Duchovny) are busy blasting holes in zombie monsters ... but will they arrive in Marhawa in time to save the rest of the cast? Is a zombie outbreak inevitable? Is "NOM" a good sound effect for zombies eating human flesh?

This manga prequel to *Resident Evil 6* is a new (and extremely silly) story, not a retelling of the game. The star of the show is Naoki Serizawa's artwork; his impressive combination of ultra-detailed photo-settings, realistic character designs, and gore invites comparisons with Hiroya Oku and American horror artist Jacen Burrows. (Both those artists, however, are better at integrating foregrounds and backgrounds than Serizawa is.) As a video game tie-in manga, its weak plot is probably unsurprising; a better English rewrite might have sanded down the inane expository dialogue ("I can't be the student council president who let a biohazard destroy the academy!"), but it couldn't have done anything with the succession of Barbie-like Catholic schoolgirls who parade before our heroes, their short skirts never flipping up too high, despite the 18+ rating. The inane plot developments that exist just to isolate our heroes ("There's no cell reception, and the school has no landline!"), the zombies springing up everywhere without clear cause and effect, make it tempting to imagine *Marhawa Desire* redone as an 80s Italian zombie shocker (perhaps directed by Umberto Lenzi ...),

Legal Drug

Although many—okay, most—of CLAMP's manga include sexual tension between handsome male characters, *Legal Drug* is the closest to a plain ol' BL manga. There's no sex (is there ever actual sex in a CLAMP manga?), but the charged relationship between the male leads is the manga's raison d'etre, with improbable plot devices requiring them to act like a couple, hit on men, and/or dress in drag. With CLAMP's cute-character specialist, Tsubaki Nekoi, on lead art duty, the series has a visual lightness as well as sex appeal.



PUBLISHER Dark Horse
STORY AND ART CLAMP
RATING 16+

It starts like a fairy tale. Tall, dark, and brooding Himura Rikuo rescues cute blond Kudo Kazahaya from the snow and takes him to the sanctuary of Legal Drug, a drugstore that turns out to be a front for mystical business. The bishonen manager, Kakei, gives the guys jobs at the store and periodically sends them on supernatural errands. They're uniquely suited to the work, it develops, because they're both psychic. Kudo possesses psychometry, the ability to see the "memories" of a place or object he touches, and can read minds under the right circumstances. Himura is telekinetic. Kakei, meanwhile, can see the future, and it's hinted that he opened the drugstore specifically to bring Kudo and Himura together as a team.

Most of the duo's odd jobs require them to find lost objects with magical power: a book that takes the form of an angry woman, a swarm of invisible fireflies, a vase in a haunted shrine. In another storyline, Kudo is forced to dress as a schoolgirl and declare his love for Himura (the client "was very specific about the scenario," Kakei assures them). Characters from other CLAMP manga make periodic cameos just for the heck of it.

Legal Drug © CLAMP • ShigatsuTsuitachi CO., LTD. 2011



Legal Drug originally ran from 2000 to 2003; after three volumes (supposedly one-fifth of the manga's intended length, although it's hard to imagine this feather-light material sustaining itself for 15 volumes), CLAMP put it on hiatus. In 2011 it returned under the title *Drug & Drop,* also available from Dark Horse. It's far from CLAMP's deepest effort, but it feels like the work of artists having fun. The goofy storylines and sexy boys give CLAMP a chance to let its inner dojinshi circle run wild. (Shaenon K. Garrity)

but it ends up more like an Asylum direct-to-DVD feature: Serizawa's art is too clean for a real zombie gore-a-thon and the characters are too bright and chirpy to create the proper grim mood. Also, disappointingly, it only features (at least in Volume 1) standard *Resident Evil* zombies and none of the twisted J'avo mutants introduced in *RE6*. Still, Serizawa's eye candy alone will pull in some readers. (Jason Bradley Thompson)

Noragami: Stray God

If you find a suspicious advertisement in a newspaper or on a bathroom stall, call the phone number and you might summon Yato, the god. Alas, for him the word "demigod" is more accurate: despite his cute bishonen looks, his war-god combat skills, and his big mouth, Yato is the most minor of minor deities, reduced to taking odd jobs for five-yen offerings. He boasts that one day he'll be bigger than Jesus (my words, not the author's) but all he seems to do is household chores and helping teenagers with their problems, when not fighting the pesky ayakashi (evil spirits) that feed off the negative emotions of human beings. ("Don't come crying to me when I'm rich and famous! I'm going to stand above all of Japan and have 120 million devotees!")



PUBLISHER
Kodansha Comics

STORY AND ART
Adachitoka

RATING
13+

Adachitoka was previously known as an artist for other creators' manga scripts, and this is their first story as a writer/artist. *Noragami* seems to be headed down the road of an ayakashi-of-the-week monster-fighting story when, in the second chapter, something unexpected happens: Yato's spirit helper Tomone gets so sick of his attitude she quits ("You homeless, unemployed, sweatsuit-clad, self-proclaimed deity!"). Yato is left alone, sleeping on park benches, until he meets Hiyori, a girl who after an accident develops the ability to see spirits and the even more unusual ability to astrally project. (Her astral form has a cat's tail.) Will Hiyori become his new partner? Or is that not appropriate work for a mortal teenager? Hiyori's exploration of her newly acquired spirit-powers provides a cool character hook for the series, or at least a more accessible hook than Yato's habit of collecting five-yen coins in an old saké bottle while fantasizing about how someday he'll be a famous deity with tons of shrines. The ayakashi battles still aren't very interesting, but the art is excellent, and there's lots of humor and snark; whether despite or because of Adachitoka's lack of previous writing experience, the familiar (for manga) premise comes off as pleasantly fresh. (Jason Bradley Thompson)

Drug & Drop

CLAMP is famous for abandoning series, often to the heartbreak of fans. (Will we ever get the ending to *X*?) Recently, however, the team seems to be revisiting some of its old titles and characters, offering the tantalizing promise of closure. After eight years on hiatus, my personal favorite unfinished CLAMP manga, *Legal Drug,* is back under the title *Drug & Drop*. At last we can learn the fates of the staff of Legal Drug, a drugstore that provides a front for back-alley magical business.



PUBLISHER
Dark Horse

STORY AND ART
CLAMP

RATING
13+

Not much has changed since we left. Snarky brunet Himura and cute blond Kudo still bicker, run errands together, and tumble into homoerotic situations together on a strikingly frequent basis. Mysterious boss Kakei and his even more mysterious pal Saiga hook the guys up with special assignments that make use of their psychic powers. Kudo is still having visions of Himura's lost love, Tsukiko, and CLAMP still intersperses every chapter with shamelessly suggestive pinup art.

But the team has a new contact with the spirit world: Watanuki, the hapless witch's apprentice from CLAMP's *xxxHolic,* who appears in *Legal Drug* as a canny and powerful magician. CLAMP always sprinkled *Legal Drug* with references to its other manga, but Watanuki plays a major role in Volume 1 of *Drug & Drop,* suggesting a full-blown crossover between *Drug & Drop* and the recently revived *xxxHolic.* (Since the drugstore in *Legal Drop* is basically a rough draft of the magic shop in *xxxHolic,* it's perhaps inevitable that the two would eventually do business together.)

Drug and Drop © CLAMP • ShigatsuTsuitachi CO., LTD. 2013



This *Drug* is darker and more complex than its earlier incarnation, closer to the gothic tone of *xxxHolic*. Himura and Kudo face a vampiric entity, Tsukiko has connections to a sinister-sounding cult called the Ship of the Moon, and even Kudo's beloved sister Kei has grown up to be bad news. For those of us who enjoyed the tongue-in-cheek (and other places) Boy's Love goofiness of *Drug,* the grim turn is something of a disappointment. But CLAMP's sleek, sexy art is better than ever, and the first volume efficiently sets up a host of supernatural mysteries for the heroes to explore. It's a welcome return of one of CLAMP's most underrated manga. **Recommended**. (Shaenon K. Garrity)

Manga Dogs



PUBLISHER
Kodansha Comics

STORY AND ART
Ema Toyama

RATING
16+

The life of the famous manga creator ... full of riches, VIP treatment, recognition, and respect, right? Wrong, as anybody who has delved in the inner workings of the manga industry knows well. Fifteen-year-old Kanna Tezuka is very aware of the hardships of being a mangaka. Although young, she has already made her magazine debut with her ongoing shojo manga series "Teach Me Buddha." That's why she chose to attend a high school that has recently established a manga major. She hopes that she'll learn a few tricks of the trade and meet fellow career-focused people, or at least be given the luxury to work on her manga in peace.

The best laid schemes of mice and men, the saying goes, and it rings true for Kanna as her classmates are far from what she expected. There is Fujio Fuji who aims to win all the manga prizes available, Shota Ishinomori who sees manga as a stepping stone to Hollywood, and Fumio Akatsuka who wishes to be a manga artist because he believes "you get to buy manga and read it for work." Apart from the fact that somebody should notify Akatsuka that his dream career is that of a manga reviewer and not of a mangaka, all three guys are extremely good looking and extremely clueless about manga creation. As soon as they discover that Kanna is a pro, they look up to her to show them the path to success without, of course, having the will to do any of the actual work. Much to Kanna's frustra-

tion, her three pupils are constantly preoccupied with issues like pen names and spending future earnings while she has to deal with deadlines, editorial suggestions, and the popularity decline of her manga.

If the aforementioned characters' names sound familiar to you, then you are the perfect audience for *Manga Dogs.* In the vein of works like *Bakuman,* this is a manga about manga. In a self-referential wink, it deals with manga's creative process, the life of the mangaka, the industry, and the fans. Moreover, Ema Toyama doesn't disappoint otaku readers as her work is full of obvious and less obvious references to manga artists, popular series, magazines, and other topics such as Kazuo Umezu's wacky house.

Manga Dogs combines this "manga about manga" trope with the shojo premise of a socially awkward female protagonist and her attractive male admirers. It's an original combination, but it's the second part, the shojo part, that doesn't work so well. *Manga Dogs* relies heavily on the comedic value of the clash between the 2D manga world and the 3D real world, but the protagonists aren't elevated to more than two-dimensional clichés. While admittedly entertaining, it leaves the reader eager for more character development and plot depth. (Myrto Tselenti)



Opus © 2011 KON'STONE, Inc.

Satoshi Kon's Opus

"Is all that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?"

—E.A. Poe

Usually, an artist molds his or her creations, breathes life into them, and controls their stories until they're released to their audience. On some rare occasions, though, the creations realize their lack of free will and revolt against their destinies.

Chikara Nagai is the mangaka of *Resonance,* a hard-boiled seinen manga series. At a climactic and highly dramatic plot twist he decides to kill one of the manga's main heroes, Lin. But Lin would rather stay alive, so he lures Nagai into his own manga, forcing him to face his creations and the repercussions of his artistic choices. Like Nagai, the readers are lured into a journey inside the fibers of the manga itself, where reality and fiction coexist, leaking through each other's cracks.

Satoshi Kon proves in *Opus* that his manga are as groundbreaking as his anime. He uses the "story within a story" trope as a starting point but progressively unfolds a fearless, postmodern deconstruction of the manga medium. *Opus* isn't an easy read; it is a complicated work, full of twists and turns, with the reader's gaze as the unseen protagonist. These fascinating metafictional devices can easily dissolve into a sterile, although impressive, exhibition of technique, but Satoshi Kon establishes his wisdom as a creator with solid storytelling where plot, intertextuality, technique, and existentialism are seamlessly woven together. In a turmoil of time and space paradoxes, Kon meticulously constructs a universe reminiscent of M.C. Escher's artwork: intricate, impossible, self-referential, an infinite loop.



PUBLISHER
Dark Horse

STORY AND ART
Satoshi Kon

RATING
16+

Opus was left unfinished when the magazine it was running in folded. Afterward Kon started creating one more chapter, with the intention to pick up the series sometime in the future, but this too was left unfinished as he was too busy with *Perfect Blue.* That roughly sketched chapter was recovered in Kon's files after his untimely demise and is included in the present edition.

Although it largely leaves the story unresolved, in a bizarre, almost metaphysical way, this chapter actually works as a most poetic and perfect conclusion. The creations are finally totally free from their creator and can forge their own destinies outside the manga panels, either by their own acquired power or with the power of the readers' imagination. **Recommended**. (Myrto Tselenti)



PUBLISHER
Retrofit/Big Planet Comics

STORY AND ART
Akino Kondoh

RATING
Unrated

Nothing Whatsoever All Out in the Open

Akino Kondoh is only 34, but she's already earned a powerful reputation as a fine artist. Her *KiyaKiya* series of oil paintings depict a ghostly, black-haired girl in a strange forest populated by tiny monkey-like creatures, and every single picture is hauntingly gorgeous. Kondoh is also a freakishly gifted animator, having recreated *KiyaKiya* as an animated art installation. Go watch the all-too-brief digest version on YouTube. (I'll wait.) Isn't it the loveliest thing you've seen in years? (Quite possibly.)

That being said, *Nothing Whatsoever All Out in the Open*—Kondoh's anthology of short manga stories—is a few steps down in quality.

Her manga art is much simpler than her paintings and animation, which makes perfect sense as a time saver. Kondoh favors a line art style with minimal detail and almost no shading. There's nothing wrong with her cartooning per se, but it's not very memorable.

The real problem with *Nothing Whatsoever* is the weak storytelling. Sometimes Kondoh relies on captions to explain what's happening because the illustrations aren't clear. In "Metamorfosa," an object falls out of a woman's eye while she's cleaning the floor. But all the reader sees is a thin vertical line descending from the eye—which could just as easily be to show you where the woman is looking. It's hard to know what's happening until a caption finally says, "Something hard fell from my eye."

The ideas themselves are intriguing, though. "The Kid in the Cabinet" is a magical realist tale about a young woman plagued by an unseen boy who pulls her into a cabinet every night while she's drifting off to sleep. Sure, it's a creepy concept, but Kondoh uses dream logic to create a tantalizing poem about one woman's ambivalence toward intimacy.

Akino Kondoh is already a great artist and a terrific animator. I hope that she one day becomes equally good at creating manga. (Josiah Shoup)

Spell of Desire

Midnight Secretary creator Tomu Ohmi has a lot of talents as a romance artist. She draws beautiful characters in unabashedly sensuous situa-



PUBLISHER
Viz

STORY AND ART
Tomu Ohmi

RATING
18+

tions, packaged in absorbing supernatural stories. But above all, she's a genius at coming up with plot devices that require the characters to make out. In *Midnight Secretary,* the businesslike heroine had no choice, poor thing, but to engage in super hot sex with her vampire boss to keep him fed. In *Spell of Desire,* the woman is the one with supernatural powers: she's a witch with enormous untapped magical reserves. And the only way to keep those mighty powers in check? Deep kissing with her handsome bodyguard.

She didn't ask for this power or these make-outs, of course. As the manga opens, Kaoruko runs an herbal tea shop in a seaside village, practicing the gentle herb lore she learned from her grandmother. Then tall, dark, and intriguingly bespectacled Kaname shows up and informs her that she belongs to a line of gifted witches. Her grandmother was the greatest white witch of her age, but her long-lost mother is an even more powerful black witch—and, for reasons yet to be revealed, her power now resides in Kaoruko. As for Kaname, he's a "knight" pledged to protect the witch queen's power at any cost—and to periodically wander around Kaoruko's house with his shirt off.

The romance is sweeter and less erotically charged than in *Midnight Secretary*; as of Volume 1, Kaoruko and Kaname have only kissed, although playing tonsil hockey in public is pretty shocking in small-town Japan. Readers who found the pushy alpha-male hero of *Secretary* too much of a jerk may prefer Kaname, a classic knight (even if he's a black knight) who will do anything for his lady. And if you don't like him, Ohmi helpfully introduces secondary male characters of various types, mostly just to have an excuse to draw more handsome men. Meanwhile, Kaoruko has to learn how to control her power, which has the effect of drawing people helplessly to her—appealing if you're a witch queen who can control it, frightening if you're a virginal herbalist who can't.

Like all of Ohmi's work, *Spell of Desire* is a pleasure to look at, every page elegantly composed. Kaoruko's witch power takes the form of decorative plant shapes curling around the page. The story seems designed to let Ohmi draw the things she likes best: pretty women, handsome men, close-ups of impassioned faces, and cute animals (Kaname has two familiars, a cat and a Shiba Inu puppy, and a rescued kitten soon joins the household). So far, Kaoruko and Kaname seem to be well on their way to a relationship that will satisfy fans of josei romance. Of course, it's all business for them. Ahem. **Recommended**. (Shaenon K. Garrity)



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This issue's web content includes:

- Crunchyroll keeps adding more *Ultraman* to its streaming stable, and we keep watching it! Read our thoughts on some of the other Ultra-offerings.
- Masashi Kishimoto's work on the *Naruto* series proper may be done, but there's plenty in store for everyone's favorite orange-clad hero.
- We have a look at more of the *Your Lie in April* anime.
- Not all anime purchases are the best decisions. Find out what's in Paul Thomas Chapman "Vault of Error,"

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Pure Hearts and Luscious Lips

Winter 2015 BL Manga Reviews

Purehearted Boys

Takagari and Yamaguchi. Kiss. A lot. In public. For laughs. Just two normal teenage guys right? No. It's a yaoi manga. What started as a game turns into slightly angsty romance complete with dubiously consensual sex. Lots and lots of sex, which is the main thing Oumi's manga has going for it.



PUBLISHER
emanga.com

STORY AND ART
Aco Oumi

RATING
18+

Our heroes' sport of PDA turns more serious when one of them (it doesn't matter, but the dark-haired one) starts macking in private. It's one thing to make out for a laugh (although who does that, really?) but it gets serious when there isn't a gaggle of girls egging them on. This somehow turns into a game of sexual chicken and Yamaguchi decides it's easier—and feels better—to go with the flow. Then come the problems. Yamaguchi can't understand why Takagari is interested in him, and Takagari can't keep himself from forcing Yamaguchi to have sex. It's close enough to true love for four chapters of pretty decent sex scenes.



Purehearted Boys - Momoiro Junjou Danshi © Aco Oumi 2005. All rights reserved. Original Japanese edition published in 2005 by Oakla Publishing Co., Ltd. All other material ©2014 by DIGITAL MANGA, Inc.

Purehearted Boys also contains a separate two-parter, "Heartbreaker," another friends-turned-lovers story. Midori declares his love to Onda, turning their friendship into pure awkwardness. To Onda, love means sex, but to Midori, who knows? He never stands a chance against Onda's ardor.

Oumi's men all have big mouths with luscious lips but her art is reminiscent of a dozen other artists. The characters' sole distinguishing features are different colored hair. (Thank goodness there are only two characters per story.) All the characters are on the thin side and zero effort is put into side characters or backgrounds. At least the quantity of sex makes up a but for the quality of the art. (Che Gilson)



Yellow 2 - Episode 1 © 2009 Makoto Tateno. All rights reserved. First published in Japan in 2009 by ENTERBRAIN, INC., Tokyo. English translation copyright ©2009 by DIGITAL MANGA, Inc.

Yellow Omnibus Edition

"One is definitely gay, while ... the other is decidedly hetero..." Together they are wacky sitcom roommates. Okay, not really, but pretty darn close. Fan favorite *Yellow,* now available in 400-page omnibus editions from emanga.com, is the tale of mismatched partners Taki and Goh. Police partners, that is: they have an ill-defined job as "Snatchers" who snatch drugs, involving a little crime and gun action and a lot of Goh's burning love for uptight, repressed Taki.



PUBLISHER
emanga.com

STORY AND ART
Makoto Tateno

RATING
18+

Most of their missions end with Goh hitting on Taki, much to Taki's gun-toting annoyance. Once in a while Taki shows signs of warming to Goh's advances and the "will they or won't they" back-and-forth fuels much of the book's compulsive readability. Each chapter is also a new case for the intrepid Snatchers, bringing new characters and complications, which alleviates the monotony of Taki and Goh's relationship. Their sleuthing is clever and plausible enough to add an extra layer of drama.

Tateno's art is detailed and she takes care with the characters and setting. Rarely do the characters float in empty space filled with sparkly screentones (though there are plenty of those). They have a place, and each new setting the plot takes them to is given equal attention. The art is kinetic and flows well, and the action sequences, usually at the climax of each chapter, are easy to read and well rendered. The book probably earns the 18+ rating for drug references, because aside from lots of flirting and the occasional swear word there isn't a lot of nudity. The one sex scene in the first 257 pages is demure by network TV standards, and the book gets marginally spicier in the second half but there is still not a peen to be

seen. But regardless of the long buildup, it's a fun read and Tateno's work has a clarity and precision not often seen in yaoi, which so often goes for vaguely rendered rumpled sheets. **Recommended**. (Che Gilson)



PUBLISHER
DMP

STORY AND ART
Makoto Tateno

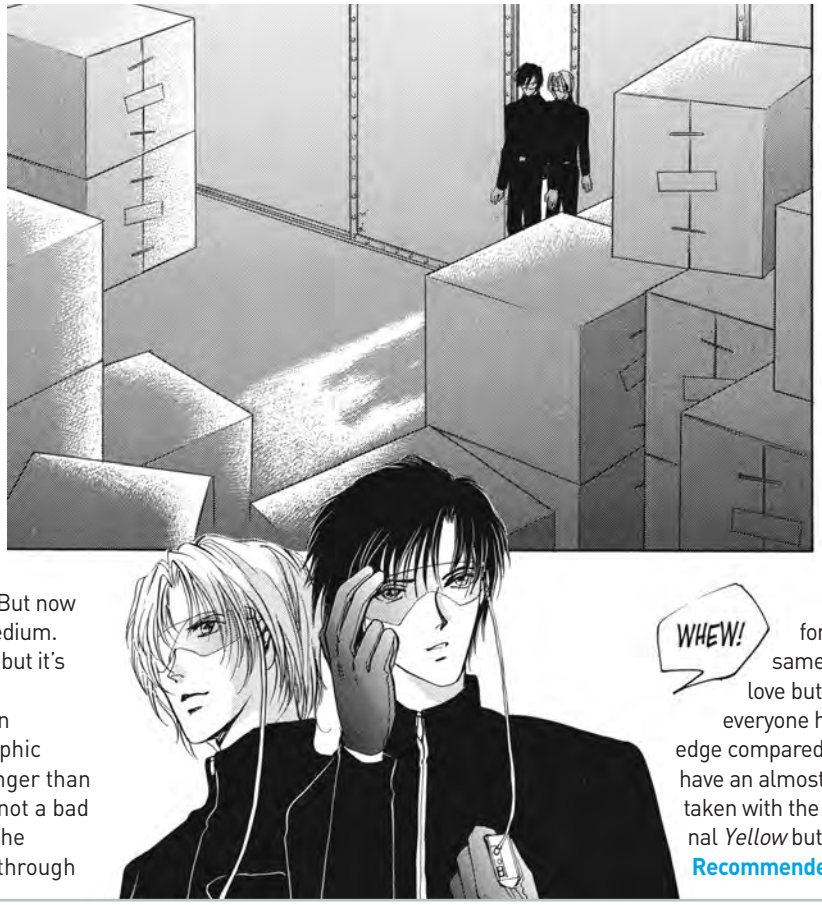
RATING
18+

Yellow 2

Taki and Goh return in an all new set of adventures. After a brief retirement, Taki and Goh are pulled back in to "Snatch" a drug shipment by their old client Hatozaki. Their romance is burning as hot as ever too, by turns passionate and bickering. But now the heat is cranked up to ... maybe a medium. There's a sex scene in the first chapter, but it's more romantic than steamy.

DMP is releasing *Yellow 2* digitally in "episodes," smaller than a typical graphic novel. At 74 pages Episode 1 is still longer than a comic book and cheaper too, so it's not a bad deal. According to emanga's website the "episodes" were distributed in Japan through cell phone and handheld devices, and perhaps because of their digital-first origins, they're very readable on computer. Hypothetically, a print edition is available as well but as of December 2014, following the link from emanga leads to a "This product unavailable" page.

Yellow: Omnibus Edition Vol. 1. ©2002, 2003, 2008 Makoto Tateno. All rights resrved. This edition is first published in Japan in 2007 by ENTERBRAIN, INC., Tokyo. English translation ©2009 by DIGITAL MANGA, Inc.



Digital or not, the basic premise remains the same: a stash of drugs has disappeared, and the cops want to find it before the yakuza can. Taki and Goh are on the case. There is a sprinkling of detective work, a splash of action, and a lot of flirting. Tateno's art also makes a bit of a leap forward. The characters are the same Taki and Goh we know and love but the inking is smoother, and everyone has a slightly more modern edge compared to the earlier books which have an almost late 80s flair. The same care is taken with the art, looking similar to the original *Yellow* but a little cleaner. **Recommended**. (Che Gilson)



Looking back on the legacy of Naruto.



After 700 chapters, after 15 years, after nearly half my lifetime, it's finally happened: *Naruto* by Masashi Kishimoto has come to its conclusion. Well, for now anyway. A sequel is practically inevitable, but with a finale like that I don't really think one is needed. What was promised to us was what was delivered.

That's important. Plenty of series have concluded unsatisfactorily with too many dangling plotlines, but *Naruto* couldn't afford to do that without alienating a generation. When we talk about anime fans in the United States, we categorize them by the catalyst that made them self-identify as "anime fans" in the first place—what I call their "gateway anime." We speak of "the



EXIT THE NINJA

BY DARYL SURAT

Star Blazers generation," "the *Robotech* generation," "the *Pokémon* generation" and so on. For the newly branded fans of the early to mid-2000s we have "the *Naruto* generation," though perhaps you remember hearing or using a more derogatory term. Online and convention maturity levels aside, *Naruto* meant so much to so many people that it now stands as the third best selling manga series in the world of all time, surpassed only by *One Piece* and *Dragon Ball*. (But mark my words: *Golgo 13* shall take back its rightful place someday ...)

Naruto Uzumaki's journey to become the greatest ninja in the land started off as the far-fetched proclamation of some dumb brat, the kind of underachieving delinquent with a vastly overinflated sense of his own competence that old people on the news would say typifies the "millennial" attitude. I've certainly seen lots of anime where the main character was insufferable yet got to beat all the cooler, more interesting supporting characters solely because "he's the hero." Indeed, that was my assessment of Naruto himself and the series in general, and admittedly it's not without merit. But, slowly but surely, that loudmouthed kid grew up and learned self-control for those willing to have faith and stick with him, be they Naruto's teachers or us following along.

Like so many great shonen battle series before, the lesson of *Naruto* was that self-confidence alone is nothing if you don't then also put forth the hard work, and even then you can't do it alone. The difference between Naruto and Sasuke was never really a question of spirit animals, special eyes, or who had the most chakra behind their punches. It was that Naruto was willing to be supported and taught along the way by multiple mentors, some of whom weren't all that willing to help at first until Naruto demonstrated his desire to learn. Sasuke may have the allure of a "bad boy loner" but we know he's lost his way, first from a desire for revenge and ultimately from his concluding that "if you can never completely eliminate evil and the only way that people work together is to stop a common foe, it's best to contain the evil in one place and have that place be me."

The optimist in me wants to say that *Naruto*'s conclusion proves that nobody is beyond salvation, no matter what atrocities they've committed.

©2002 MASASHI KISHIMOTO / 2007 SHIPPUDEN







ONLINE EXCLUSIVE:
Masashi Kishimoto's work on the *Naruto* series proper may be done, but there's plenty in store for everyone's favorite orange-clad hero. Read all about the future of *Naruto* at **www.otakuusamagazine.com**!



That even if you literally have personal demons within you, you can overcome those to be a force for love and righteousness. (This being a fighting series, someone may need to punch you with massive force first before you wake up to that.) But the pessimist in me says the cast of *Naruto* were just victims of their own popularity. The villains were just too charismatic and garnered too much sympathy to stay evil. Character popularity polls demanded that they either not be killed off or sacrifice themselves heroically with tears. Kishimoto then had to create even badder villains who were really behind it all, until THEY turned good at which point the BADDER badder villains who were really REALLY it all got introduced, and so the cycle went for years such that the true, ultimate ninja enemy doesn't appear until about the last 50 (or 100, depending where you want to count from) chapters of manga. Whoever you THOUGHT were the villains up until then don't get their comeuppance, no matter who they gleefully murdered. In fact, every character who had previously died got (temporarily) brought back to life just so they could resolve any unresolved issues

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they had with the living prior to the last battle ... that gets followed by the REAL last battle!

And then, all the guys married all the girls and they all had babies at the exact same time. The final chapter sets up the groundwork for a possible sequel, as we're introduced to the children of well, most everybody. For years fans have argued over which characters should end up together in relationships, and these "shipping wars" over "one true pairings" have sparked many fan derivative works. But now the final canonical truth is here, and everyone's just going to have to accept it because it's more a question of "when" rather than "if" as far as future adventures featuring this new generation of ninja trainees that look and act ... well, pretty much exactly like their parents.

Still, when everything gets wrapped up in a neat bow like that, do we really want a sequel to *Naruto*? How much would we want to invest in these kids when the characters we grew up with are still right there? True, the final story arc put the brakes on all the supporting characters' development since they completely didn't factor into the last battle, and afterward everybody just decided to wander home such that there could be an "interquel" set between the timeskip to fill in the blanks, but there wouldn't be that much suspense to it since it's clear where most everybody's ending up.

Perhaps none of that matters. Let's not forget what drew so many to *Naruto* in the first place: Masashi Kishimoto made the idea of "ninja" modern and cool again. Extrapolating from the foundational supernatural elements that Futaro Yamada conceptualized in *The Koga Ninja Scrolls* so many decades ago, Kishimoto's ninja were a colorful hybrid of tactical militarism, exotic weaponry, and American-style superheroes rolled into one. Sure, the fact that no two ninja looked the same flew in the face of the traditional ninja ideals of being an agent for stealth, espionage, and covert assassination. Heck, the only thing Naruto himself ever stood a chance of blending in with was if he had to disguise himself as a crossing guard in winter! But they sure were memorable, and when it comes to shonen action/adventure, memorable characters trump all.

Maybe you were once big into *Naruto,* then your interest lapsed over time. Maybe you moved onto other anime, and maybe you decided you'd check in on *Naruto* to see how things turned out, only to find yourself wondering, "Wait, who are all these people? I never saw them—hold up, is that one dude a black rapper ninja who also has a fox spirit? And wait, Rock Lee can open HOW many gates now?!" If that's you, then I don't want to spoil any details, but suffice it to say that every question you had about the world's history was answered. You want to know how Kakashi got that eye, who Naruto's parents were, or where chakra originates from? We found out, and then some. And hey: you're already reading this magazine so while you're at it, check out some of the new anime that's out. After all, *Bleach* is also about to end, too!

Naruto is available from Viz Media.









LIKE SO MANY GREAT SHONEN BATTLE SERIES BEFORE, THE LESSON OF NARUTO WAS THAT SELF-CONFIDENCE ALONE IS NOTHING IF YOU DON'T THEN ALSO PUT FORTH THE HARD WORK, AND EVEN THEN YOU CAN'T DO IT ALONE.

HOW NARUTO REVOLUTIONIZED THE WORLD

No disrespect toward Ohtori Academy's student council, but few single anime titles reshaped the anime industry to the extent of *Naruto*. Just think back for the last year and ask yourself: how do YOU follow *Naruto*? Do you follow the English-subtitled Japanese audio simulcast streams, which come out within hours of the episode airing in Japan? Do you wait for the English dub on Neon Alley, which comes out not four but SIX episodes a month? Did you read the individual chapters in the digital edition of *Weekly Shonen Jump,* released within days of new chapters being released in the Japanese edition? Perhaps you buy the collected volumes, which for a few months came out weekly just to catch up with Japan's collected volumes? Well, all of the infrastructure for that didn't just exist. It had to be created, and the driving force behind all of those measures was so that fans in America could legally get *Naruto* in professional quality as quickly, conveniently, and affordably as possible. Now that it's all set up, we can use it to watch and read other anime and manga as well. It's all thanks to those kids in the metal headbands. Believe it.

OTAKU USA MANGA PREVIEWS

We bet you know how this works already, but for those of you in the cheap seats, our manga section is printed in the correct Japanese format, to be read from right to left. Begin on the upper right of each two-page spread, reading each panel right-to-left, from the right page to the left. Click the arrow on the right side to advance to the following pages.



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SERAPHIM 266613336 WINGS

PAGE 39
BY MAMORU OSHII AND SATOSHI KON

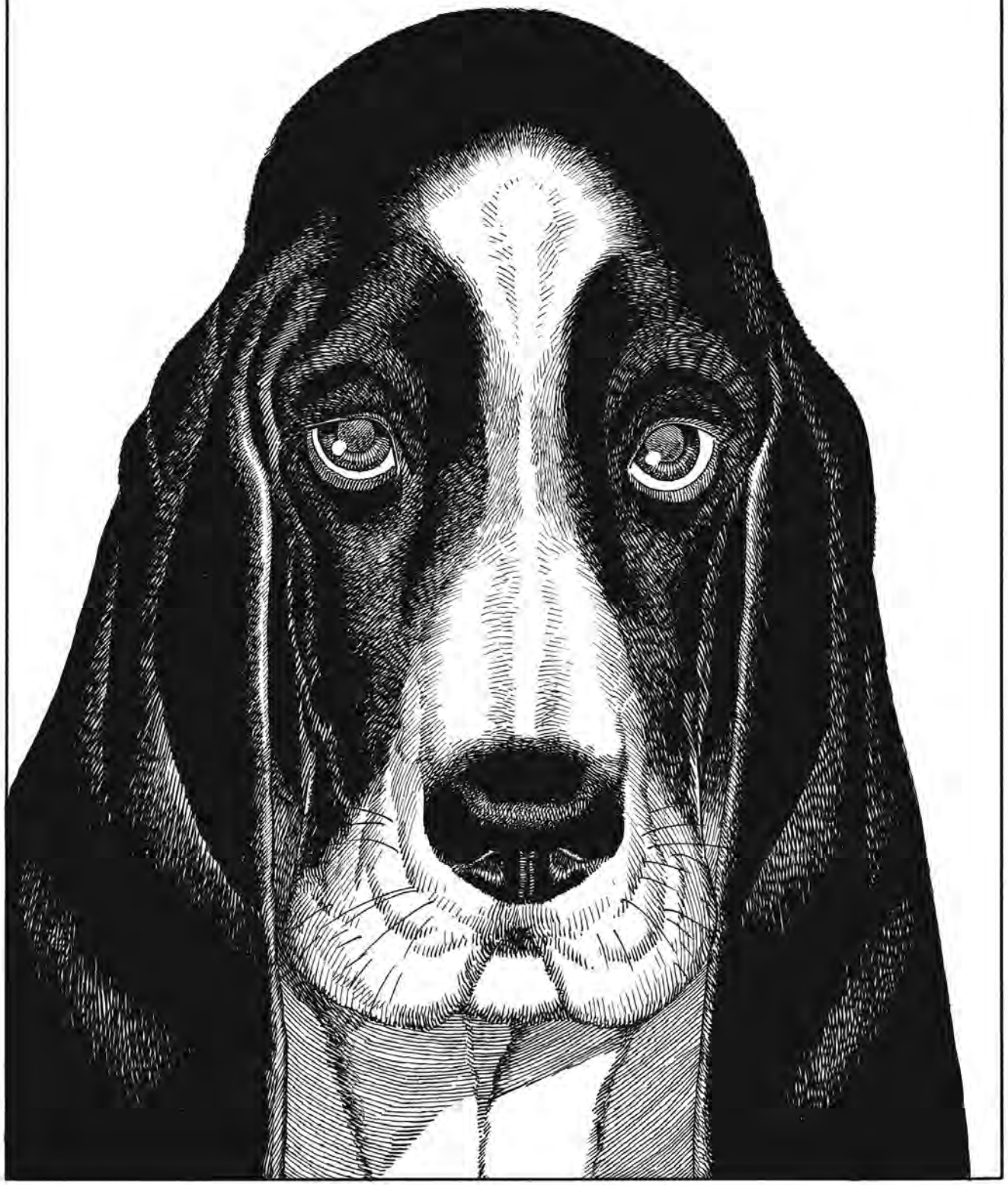
Once, two of anime's greatest directors made a manga together: *Seraphim 266613336 Wings*. Created by *Ghost in the Shell*'s Mamoru Oshii and *Paprika*'s Satoshi Kon, *Seraphim* was commissioned by Japan's legendary *Animage* magazine to take the place of Hayao Miyazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* after that manga ended. *Seraphim* is the story of a future Earth ravaged by a pandemic of the same name, a disease that twists its victims' bodies into angelic forms even as it destroys their minds with apocalyptic visions. Ten years later, with the old nations now collapsed under a flood of plague refugees, three "Magi" travel together with Sera, a mysterious young girl, on an epic journey into the heart of Central Asia, searching for what may be a cure. But of course, a cure for Seraphim could reshape a shattered world, and the Magi find their medical mission is caught up in a serpents' nest of politics and power...

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chapter
five



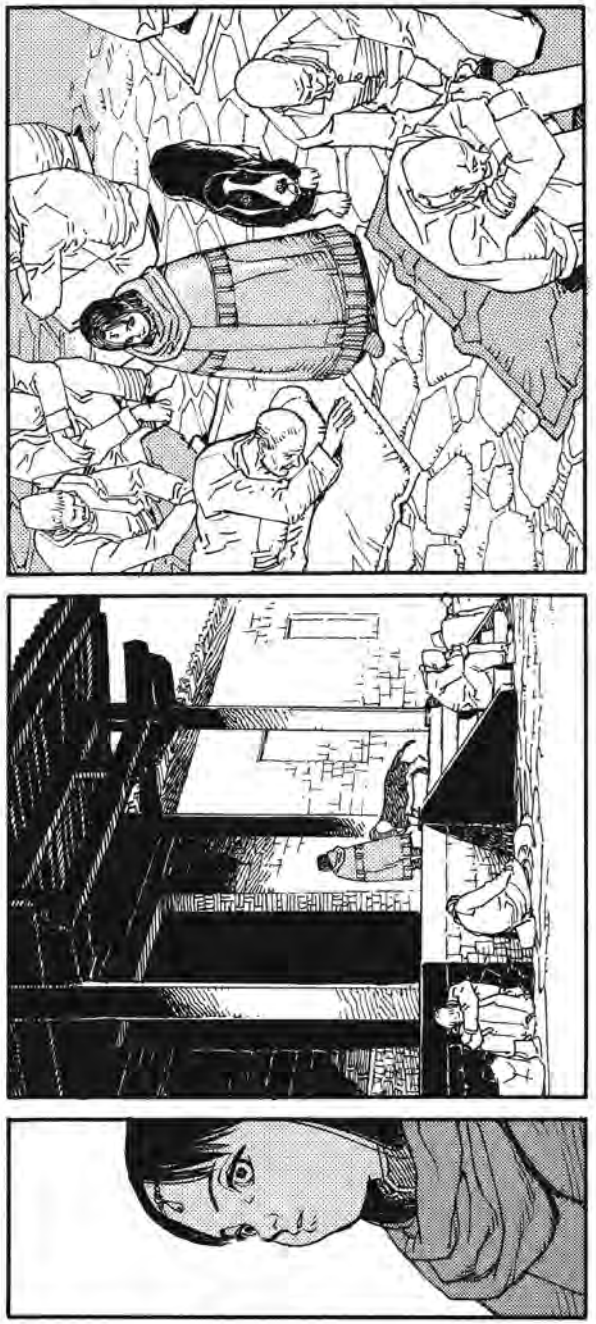
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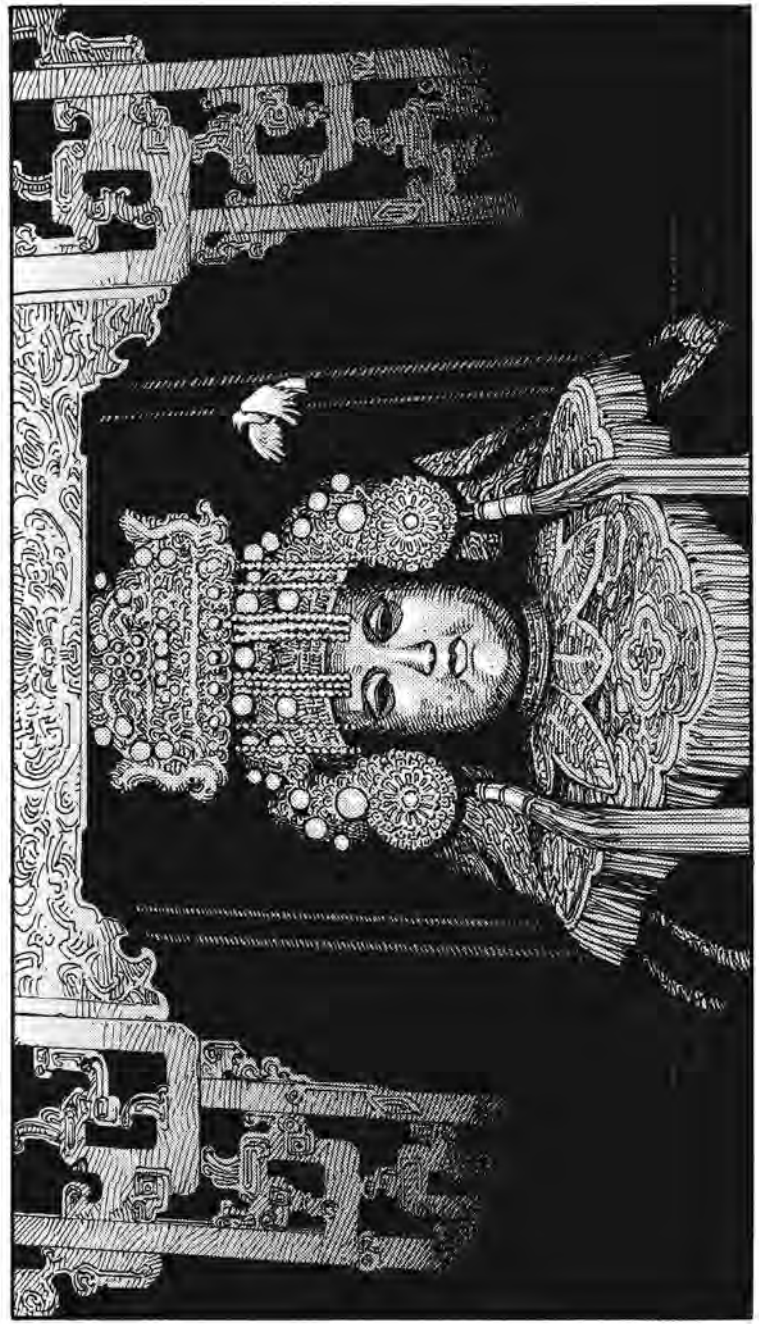


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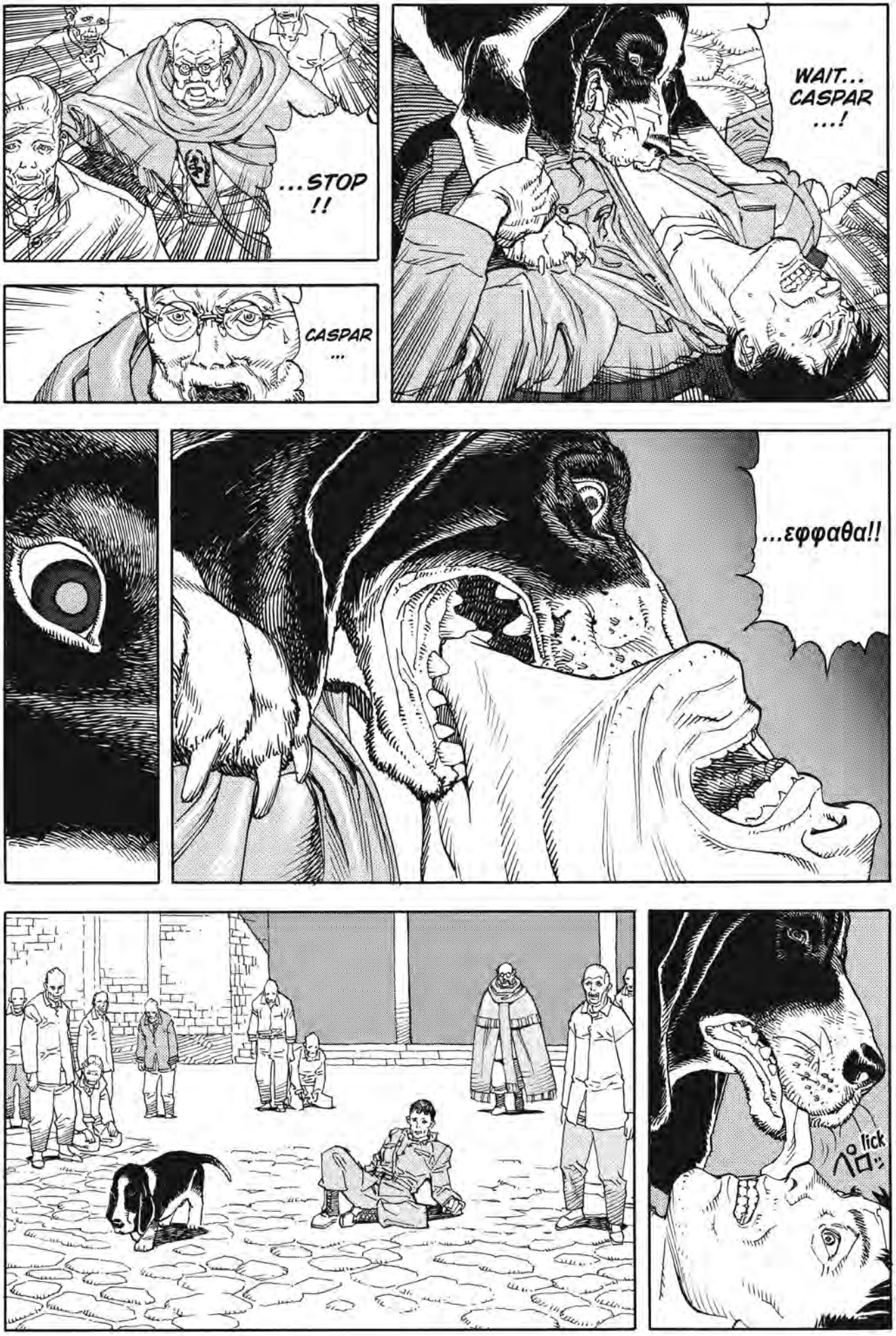
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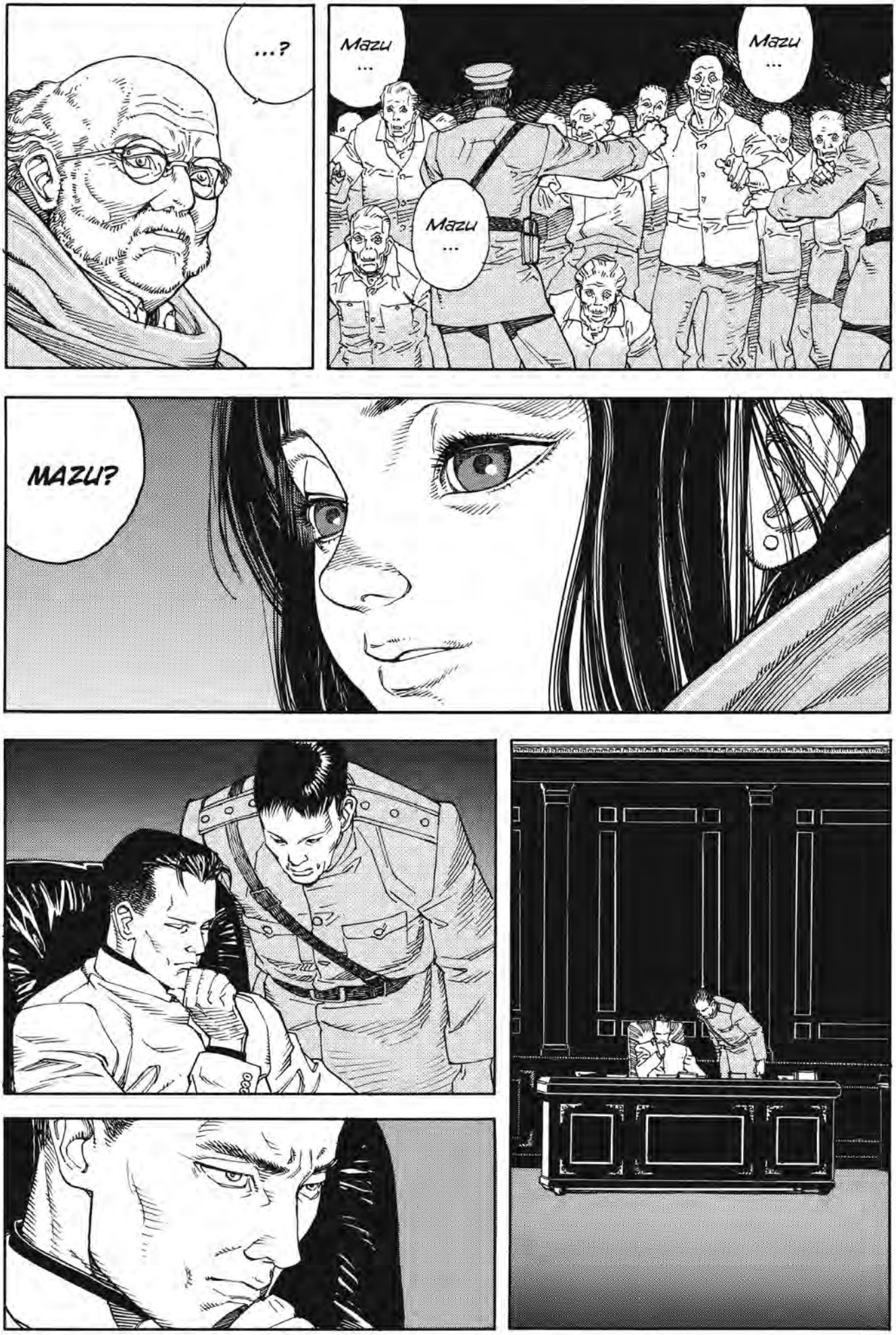
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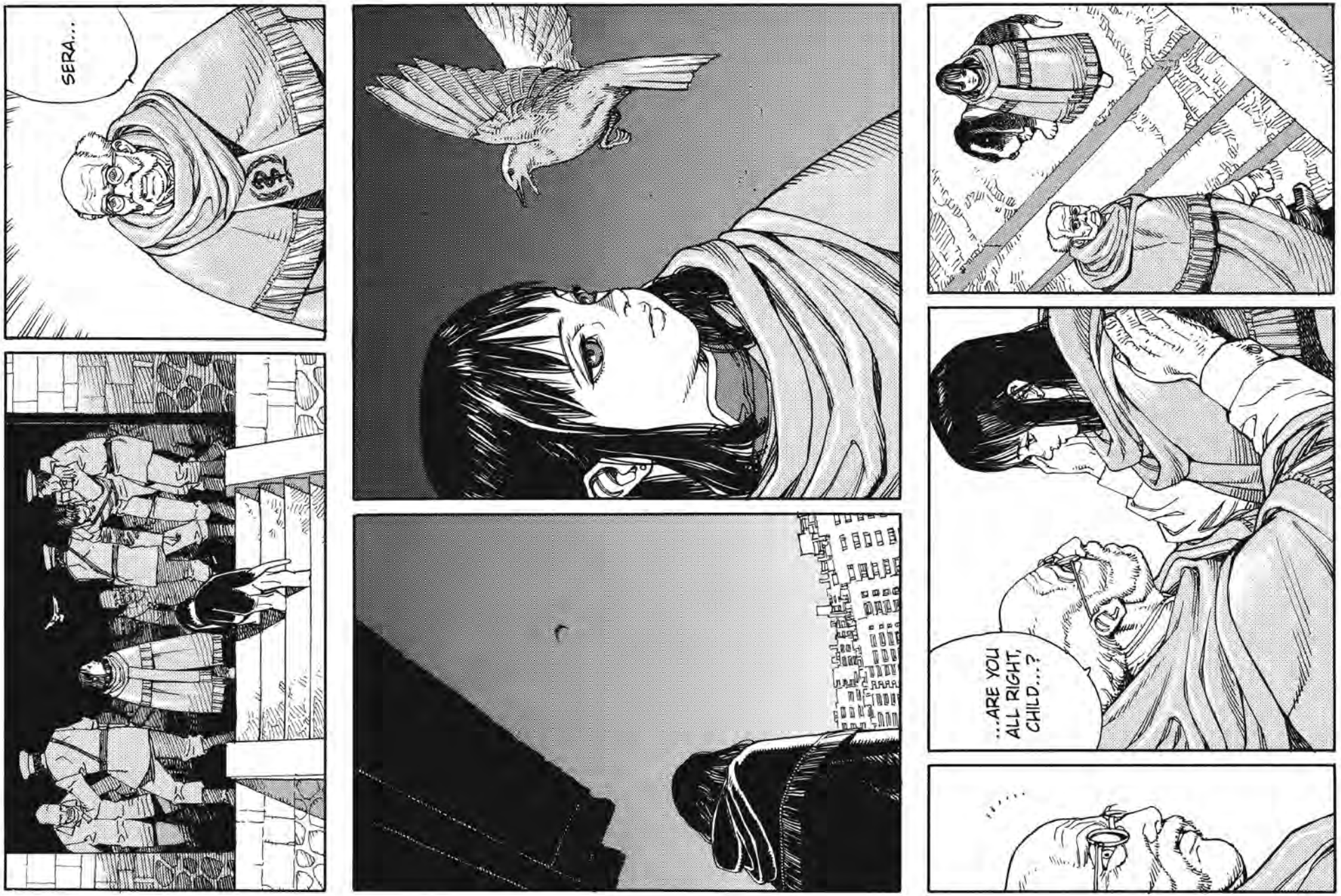


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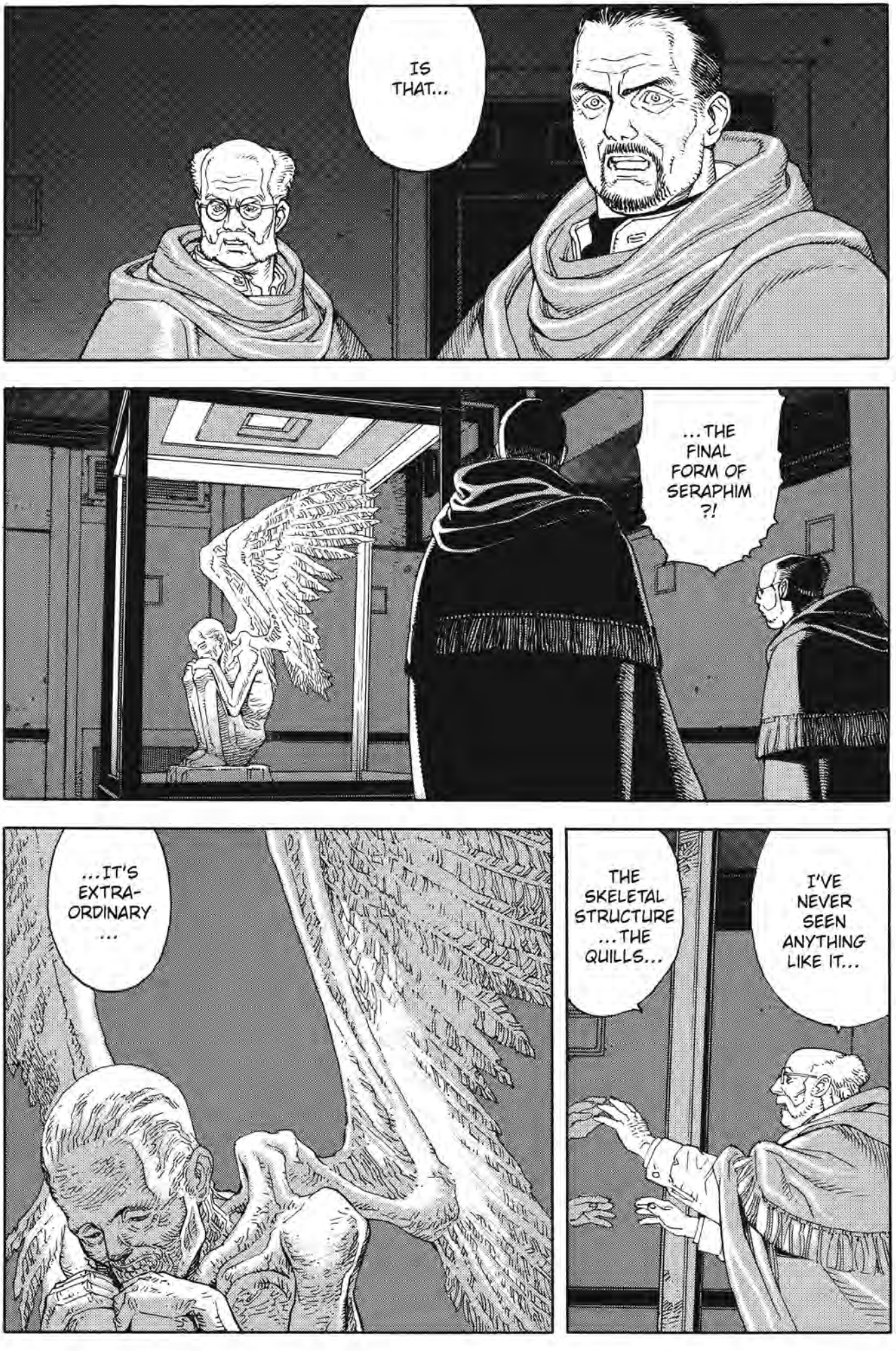
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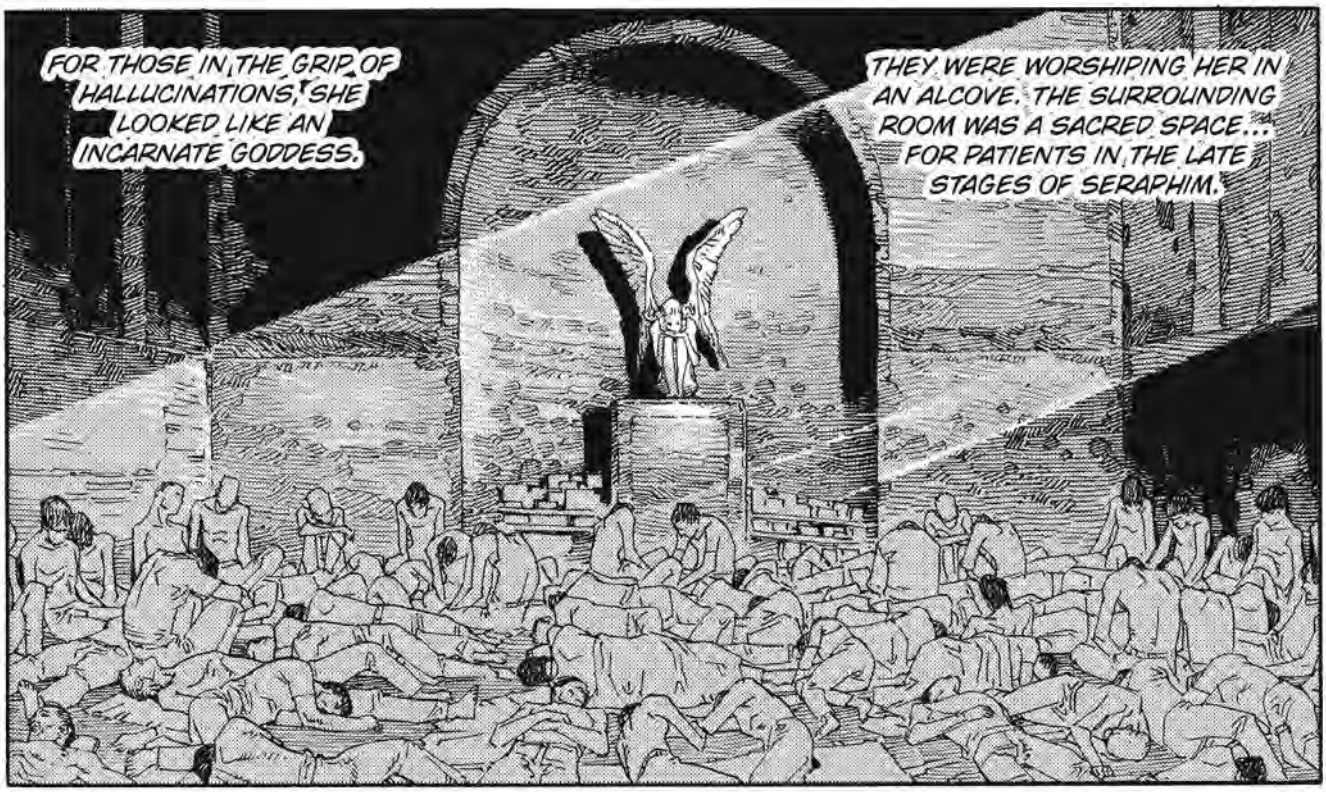


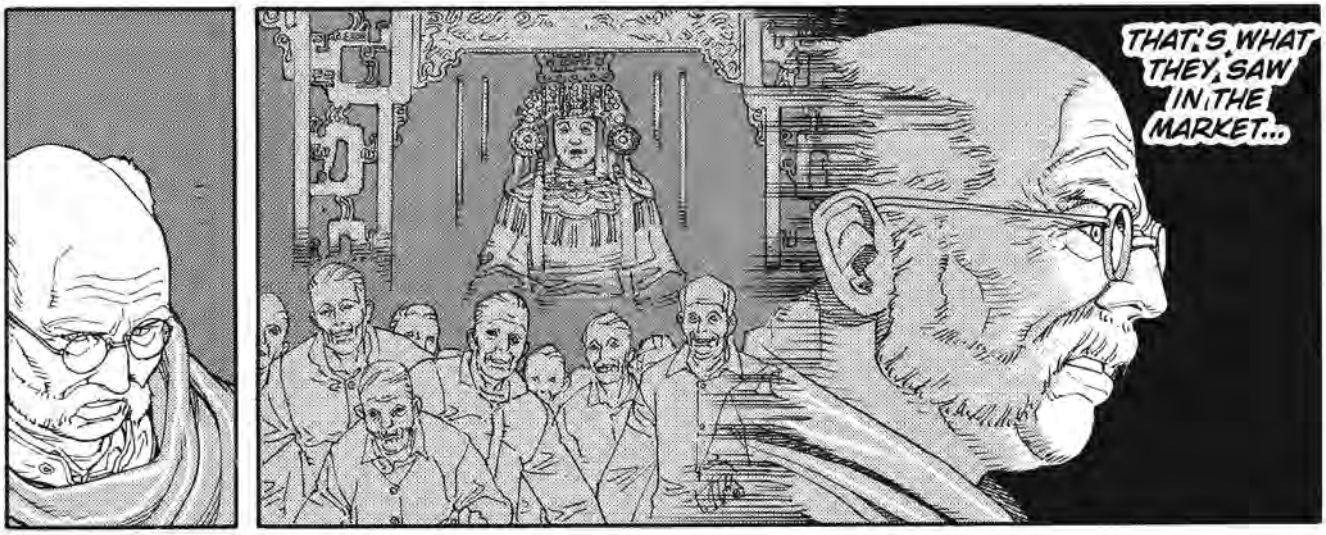
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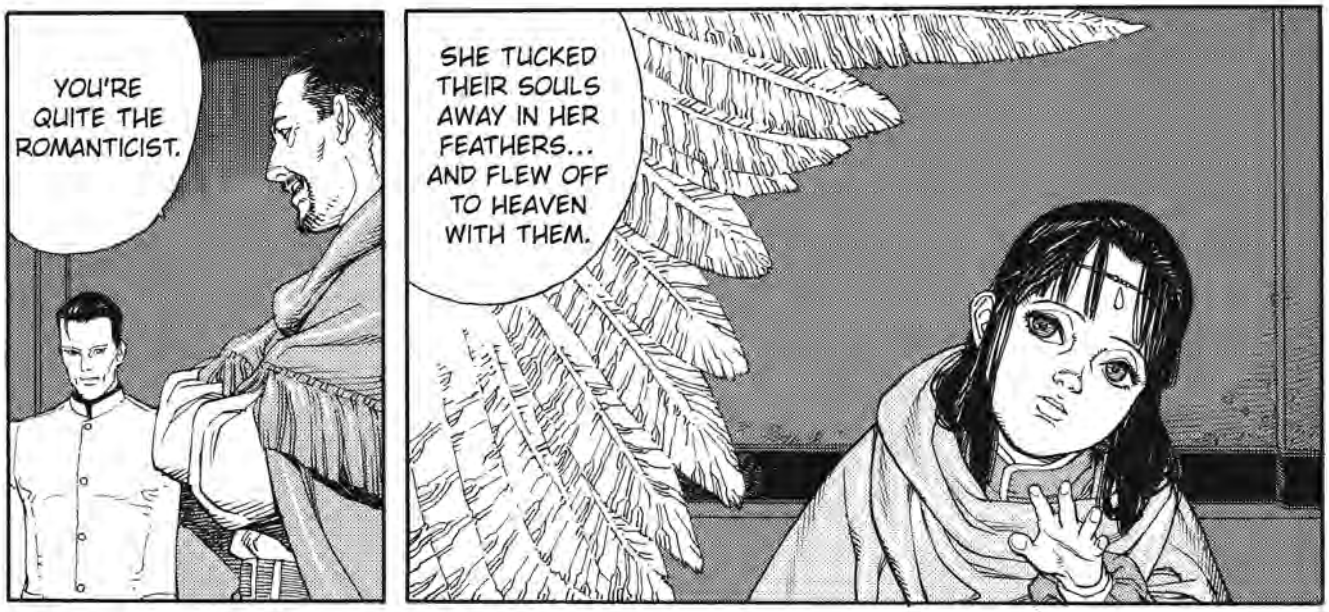
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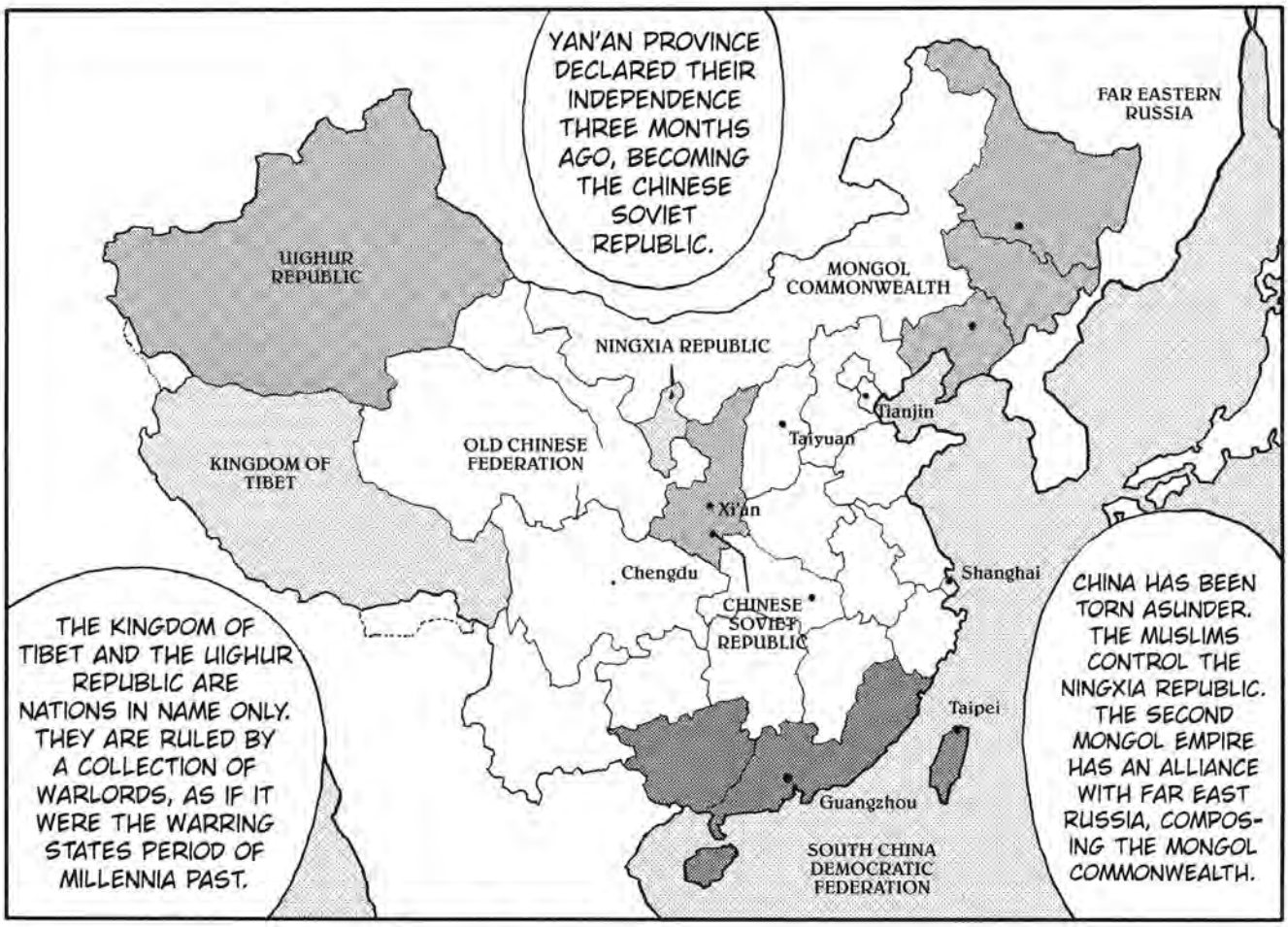


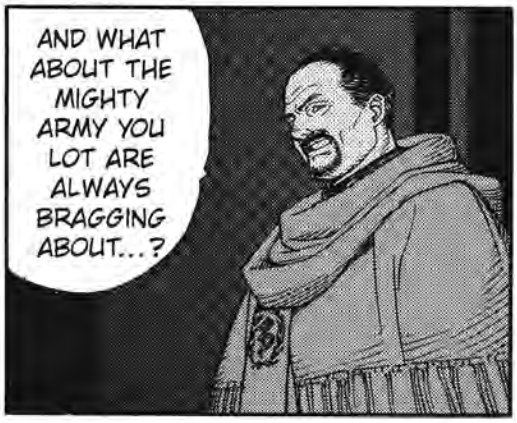


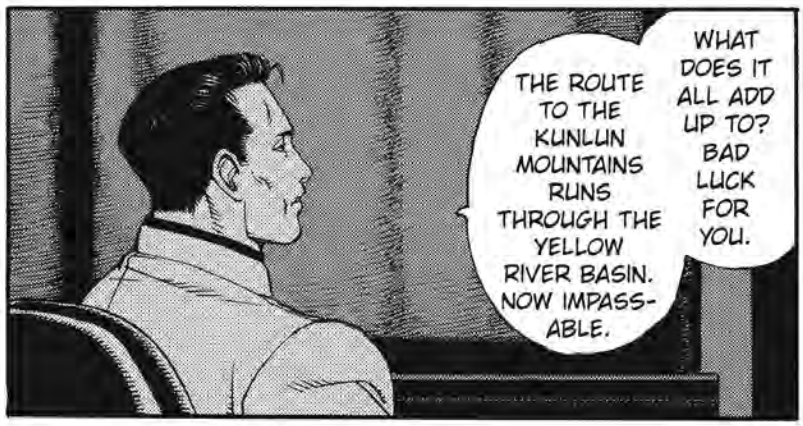
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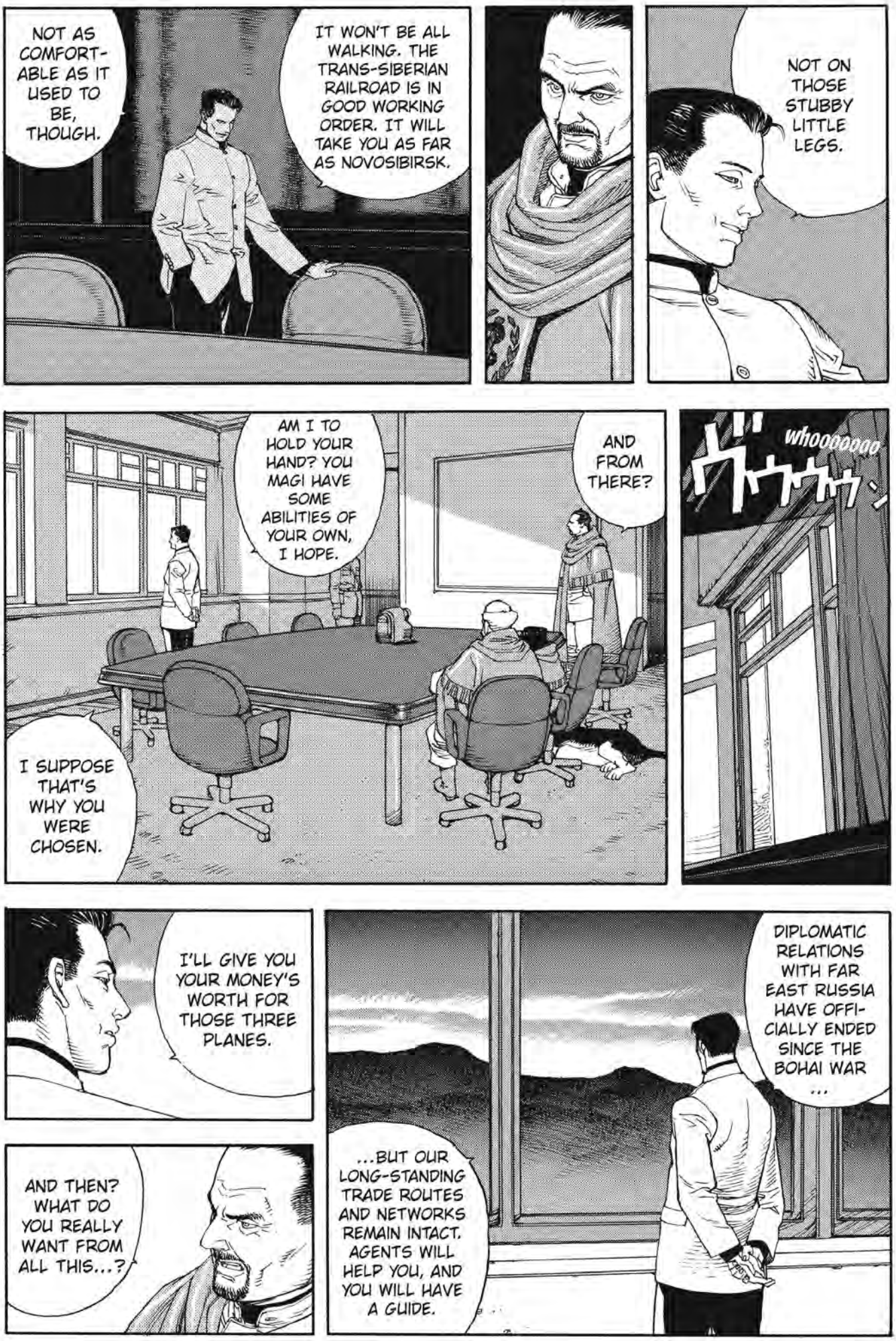






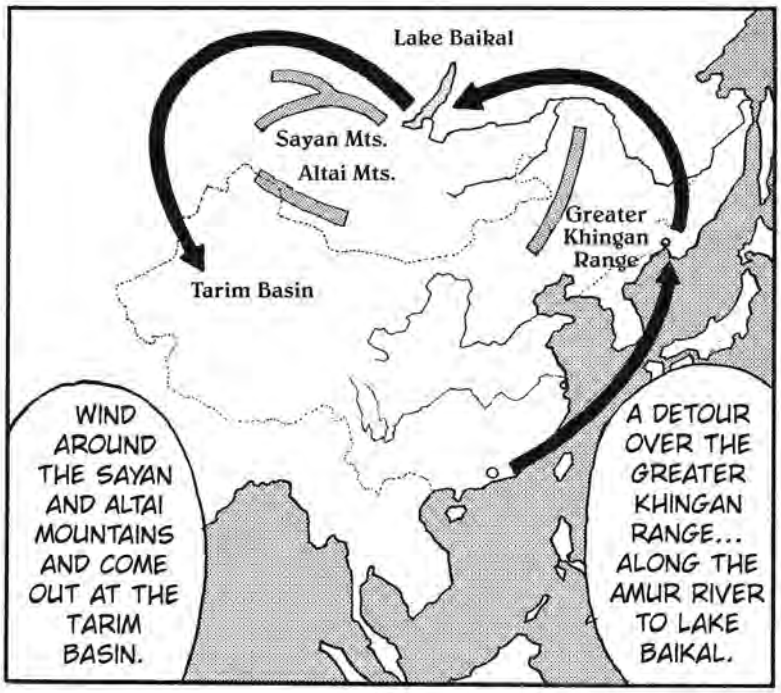
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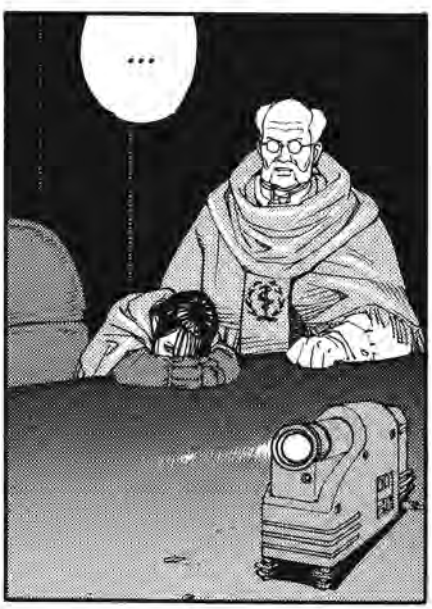


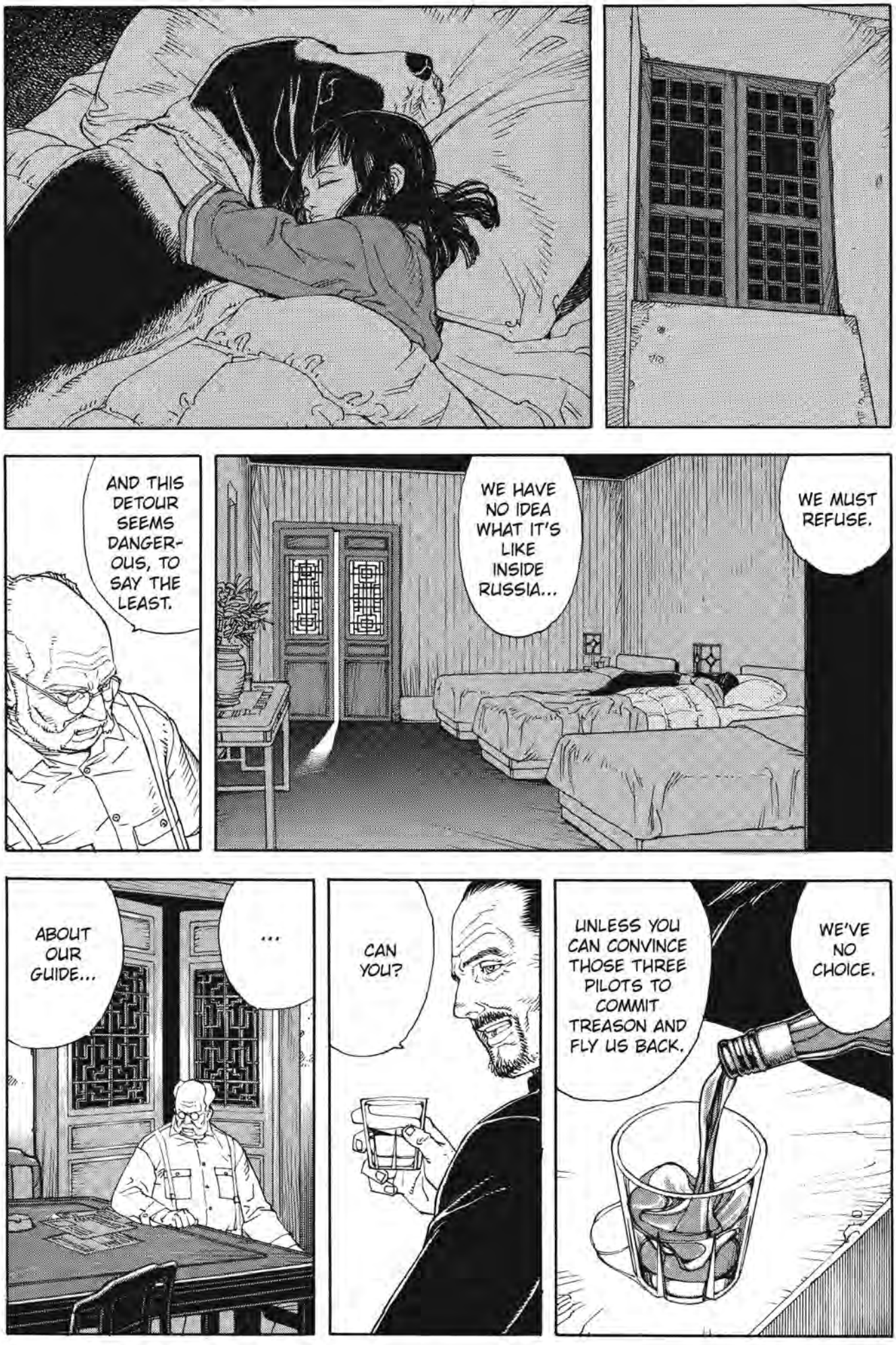












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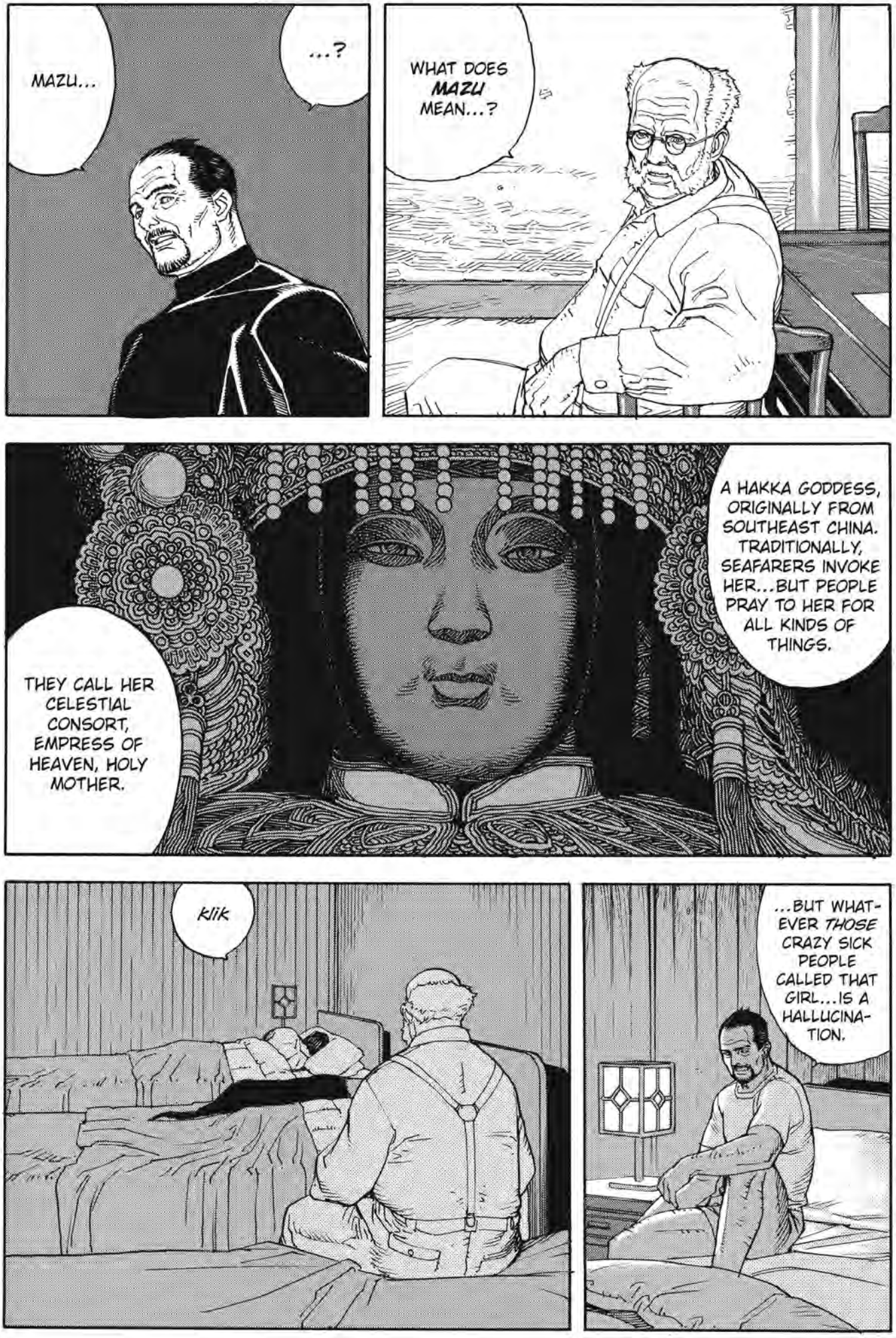
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Read the rest in *Seraphim 266613336 Wings,* available February 18th, 2015.

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Section 23



MUV LUV ALTERNATIVE COLLECTION I BLU-RAY (3 winners)

In 1973, an alien species known as the BETA invaded the earth, driving humanity to the brink of extinction. With no weapon powerful enough to counter the BETA's overwhelming strength, mankind developed large humanoid arms called Tactical Surface Fighters, and deployed them across the globe in hopes of driving back this unstoppable enemy. But despite their best efforts, the BETA threat could not be stopped, and after 30 years the human race is still trapped in an increasingly hopeless war with no end in sight.... Now, in 2001, Imperial Japan struggles to develop a new generation of TSFs while continuing to defend its frontline. In response, the United Nations proposes a joint development program between Japan and the United States, one which will unite pilots from around the world in an international initiative known as the Prominence Project. Two pilots—Yui Takamura of the Imperial Royal Guards of Japan and Yuya Bridges of the US Army—head to the icy wilderness of Alaska in hopes of finding a way to stop the BETA once and for all. But neither are prepared for the way in which their fates will forever be changed when they finally meet. As humanity hangs in the balance, two souls will intertwine as the new age of Tactical Surface Fighters emerges to defeat the BETA in MUV LUV ALTERNATIVE: TOTAL ECLIPSE!



LEVIATHAN~THE LAST DEFENSE BLU-RAY (3 winners)

The land of Aquafall is a paradise where life in all forms flourishes in peace and abundance. But when meteors rain down, each impact spawns hideous monsters sent by an enemy that wants to claim the green world for its own! Fortunately, the fairy Syrup is on guard and knows exactly what to do. She recruits an extraordinary team of young women to form the Aquafall Defenders. There's the incredibly strong Jormungand, the fire-conjuring Bahamut, and the water-bending Leviathan. Unfortunately none of them are ideal warrior material, and Syrup will have her work cut out for her when it comes to teaching them to work together. Even if they manage to survive and unite as a team, can three lone girls really turn the tide of an alien invasion? Well, it might help that they've all got a little bit of Dragon in them! The scales of fate will turn as the future of Aquafall hangs in the balance in LEVIATHAN ~ THE LAST DEFENSE!



ENGAGED TO THE UNIDENTIFIED BLU-RAY (3 winners)

Not every girl gets what she wants on her 16th birthday, but Kobeni's gift is something she never saw coming: an arranged marriage! Thanks to her late grandfather, Kobeni's been engaged to a total stranger since childhood, and even though she's supposedly met him she doesn't remember a single thing about him. Even weirder is that both her Mom and creepily overdoting sister, Benio, seem completely unsurprised when the groom-to-be, Hakuya, and his younger sister, Mashiro, show up on the family's doorstep to move in with them! But it's not until they start attending Kobeni's school that things take an even stranger turn after she starts to pick up some very ... unusual vibes from her potential future family. From Mashiro's obsession with aliens and UMAs (Unidentified Mysterious Animals), to Hakuya's disconcerting lack of emotion, there's something very off about them that Kobeni can't quite put her finger on. What has her grandfather gotten her into? And how does this relate to the strange gap in Kobeni's memory? From weird science to the supernatural, almost anything can happen when you're ENGAGED TO THE UNIDENTIFIED!

Right Stuf via Nozomi Entertainment



Cat's Eye Season 2 (6 winners)

Together, Hitomi, Rui, and Ai are Cat's Eye, the greatest art thieves Japan has ever known. But they don't steal for money or fame—they do it in the hopes of finding their father, a great painter who went missing after World War II. While they search for him in Europe, a new female thief claiming to be Cat's Eye wreaks havoc in Tokyo! Her brutal methods are putting the lives of the police at risk.... It's time for the real Cat's Eye to head back to Japan and bring her reign of terror to an end! Contains Episodes 37-73.

For more about the series, visit: catseye.rightstuf.com

Right Stuf via Lucky Penny Entertainment

Space Pirate Mito Complete Collection (6 winners)



Most teenage boys have enough trouble just dealing with the pressures of school and dating, but 15-year-old Aoi Mitsukuni's life becomes exponentially more complicated when his mom returns from a long "business trip." He discovers that not only is his beautiful mother actually an alien, but she's the notorious Space Pirate Mito to boot! To make matters worse, the girl Aoi likes at school is actually a secret Galactic Patrol agent attempting to find and arrest his mother. No one ever said being a teenager in love was easy! Contains Episodes 1-26.

For more about the series, visit: mito.rightstuf.com

Fantastic Detective Labyrinth Complete Collection (6 winners)



Thirty years ago, Tokyo was destroyed in a massive earthquake. Most people have moved on to a new capital, Shinto, but a string of bizarre murders and supernatural events keep occurring in the ruins of the old city. The only one with the ability to see through to the heart of these mysteries is the enigmatic Mayuki Hyuga, a boy with extraordinary detective skills and powers that even he doesn't yet understand. Together with his guardian and butler Seiran Shinano, Mayuki must not only help the police solve cases, but also uncover the secrets of his lineage. Contains Episodes 1-25.

For more about the series, visit: labyrinth.rightstuf.com

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LIVING DEAD GIRL

Sankarea: Undying Love sets a new standard for zombie horror anime

ON the surface, *Sankarea: Undying Love* seems like a completely throwaway, cutesy anime. In fact, it's perfectly natural if you hesitate before taking the plunge with the manga or giving the anime series a chance. There are enough "weirdo guy falls for cute girl who happens to be X" yarns out there to know how patronizing and horrible they usually end up, but there's something about *Sankarea: Undying Love* that sets it apart from the massive amount of fluff in the sea of romance series.

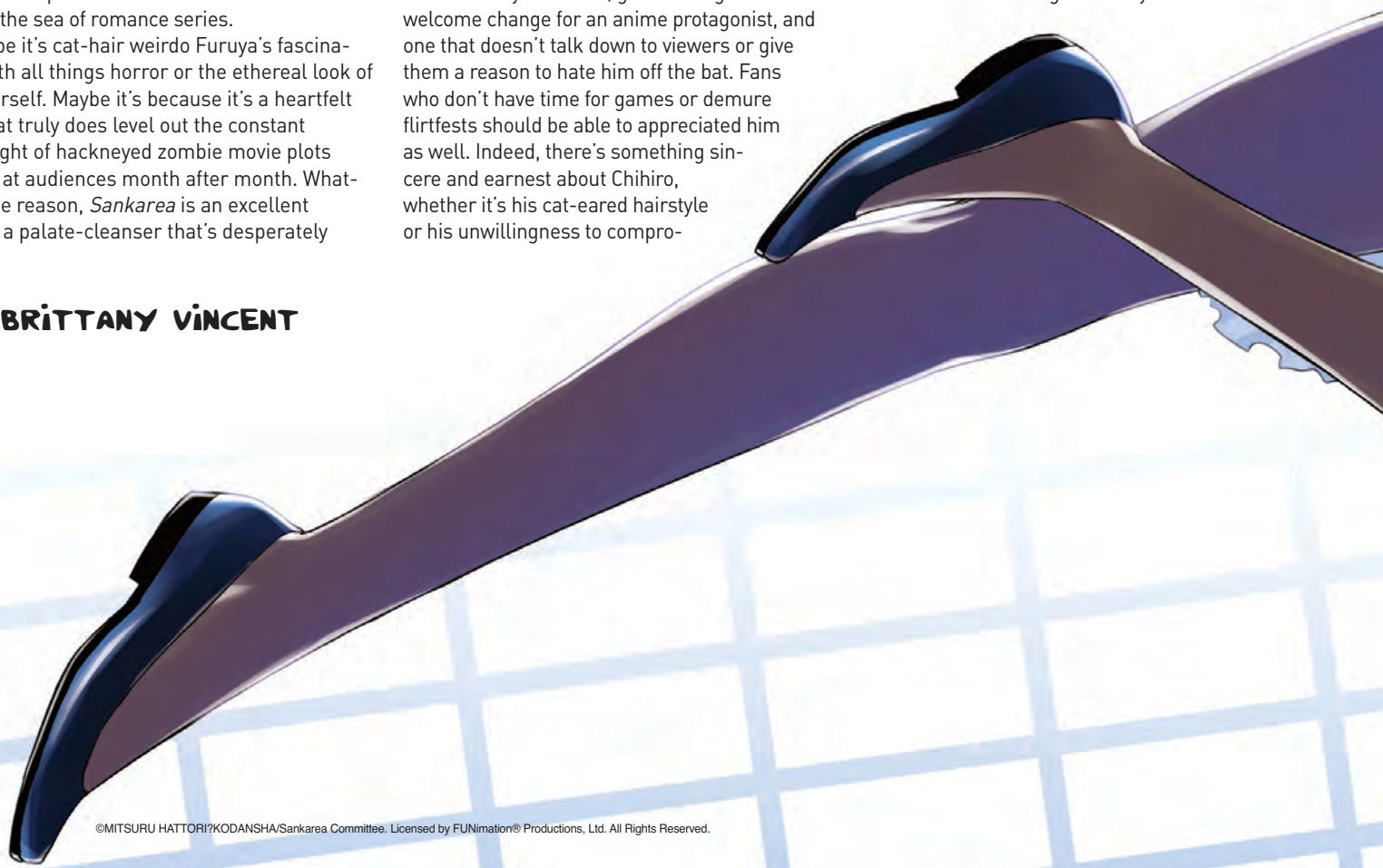
Maybe it's cat-hair weirdo Furuya's fascination with all things horror or the ethereal look of Rea herself. Maybe it's because it's a heartfelt tale that truly does level out the constant onslaught of hackneyed zombie movie plots hurled at audiences month after month. Whatever the reason, *Sankarea* is an excellent watch; a palate-cleanser that's desperately needed in this day and age to stand up against the abominations of zombie and horror anime that simply fail to innovate.

SHE'S GOT RED ON HER

This modest 13-episode series introduces you to a likable male protagonist whose shyness mixed with perversion isn't cloying but more of an attractive quality. For those who belong to the school of "if you want it, go out and get it!" he's a welcome change for an anime protagonist, and one that doesn't talk down to viewers or give them a reason to hate him off the bat. Fans who don't have time for games or demure flirtfests should be able to appreciated him as well. Indeed, there's something sincere and earnest about Chihiro, whether it's his cat-eared hairstyle or his unwillingness to compromise Rea's modesty throughout the weird journey they both find themselves in after a particularly bizarre turn of events.

You see, Chihiro Furuya is obsessed with horror. His dream girl? A zombie. They're as inexplicably desirable to him as One Direction is to young girls. It's hard to understand for sure, but at least he knows what he likes, and you've gotta respect that. One day, his beloved cat Babu dies after being struck by a car. The loss

BY BRITTANY VINCENT



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SANKAREA is a touching tale of love that transcends the bounds of mortality with sprinkles of darkness that make it much more than just a pretty face.



is understandably devastating to him, so he does what any normal teenager would: he endeavors to bring the animal back to life by way of a dusty old spellbook. It's got a list of ingredients to create a potion that will bring the dead back to life. Off he goes to perfect his potion in an abandoned building, until Rea Sanka comes along.

He finds the wealthiest girl in school screaming into a well about how her parents are controlling her life, namely her father, and how it's not okay that he's still taking naked pictures of her on every birthday. Wait, hold up—what, exactly? It's at this point you'll want to sit up and pay close attention. We've got the setup for a slapstick comedy that'll find some way to pair the main character with a zombie girl and plenty of room for fanservice. So why is this girl dredging up personal issues like these? Inevitably, you'll want to know more. You're going to get hooked—there's no way around it. Best to buckle up and settle in for the ride.



AFTER THE HYDRANGEAS WITHER

Rea must keep herself sentient and "living" by consuming hydrangea flowers, which aren't exactly easy to come by when pressed for time or just out and about. If for some reason she can't nibble on the life-giving leaves then, like Babu, she's doomed to fall into a "confused" state at night, where she'll develop a taste for human flesh just like "real" zombies in the world of the undead. She'll also begin to degenerate and waste away, falling victim to the normal decomposition process that all humans succumb to. It's important that Rea is kept alive with these all-important flowers, or she'll meet the same end as any other human would, though it'll be a much slower process.

Chihiro is fascinated by the girl and they eventually begin speaking, with Rea becoming invested in his efforts to bring back Babu. They grow ever closer as it's revealed the poor girl has a disgusting and rather disturbing relationship with her father, who appears to believe he owns her, mind, body, and soul. The campaign to bring Babu back to the land of the living continues to fail, until one night they perfect a special potion created with deadly hydrangeas. It doesn't work, but Rea is seen secretly pocketing some, asking Furuya if he'll take care of her if she becomes a zombie.

After a few depressing events that won't be spoiled here for the sake of new viewers, Babu is brought back to life, as is Rea herself, thanks to the potion—but they're zombies now. Furuya's dream girl is finally right in his grasp, but how is he going to keep her "alive" as her body is decomposing right before his eyes? And now that Rea is supposedly free of her father's tyranny, what lengths will he go to so he can have her all to himself?

It's a fascinating ride from start to finish, which you'll endure with gusto, even when some minor characters are given entire episodes that do little to serve the main plot line. Rea's father is a lecherous, possessive creepster who deserves every bit of pain that comes his way, and Rea's mother? Well, let's just say she's a waste of oxygen. Still, they offer a meatier plot than *Sankarea* would have otherwise offered and for that you'll be grateful.

A LOVE OF THE HORRIFYING

What many viewers will come to appreciate is Chihiro's unabashed love of the horror genre and surrounding media. He collects zombie films, has recognizable figures in his bedroom, and even gets Rea in on the fun. Cousin Ranko doesn't exactly understand the fixation, but it's refreshing to see a character who isn't constantly harassed because of the things he loves. Anime fans who get enough of that ribbing should be able to appreciate his personality as well. It's also admirable that Chihiro's family doesn't have it in for him despite knowing the types of interests he has.

That's what's so refreshing about *Sankarea* as a whole. It has a delightful way of making readers really care about its main characters. And despite its insistence in some episodes on a few tired tropes and bland fillers, it's a gorgeous and effervescent change of pace, ironically breathing life into a genre that needs resuscitation just as Babu the cat does. It's a touching tale of love that transcends the bounds of mortality and it is engaging from episode to episode, with sprinkles of darkness that make it much more than just a pretty face. Give it a look and be pleasantly surprised by how different (and noncreepy!) it actually is.

***Sankarea: Undying Love* is available from FUNimation.**

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SNUGGLE UP TO THE BIG, FLUFFY, GRUMPY PROTAGONIST OF GINGITSUNE

Religion can be a divisive subject, to say the least. The myriad denominations around the world and throughout human history differ in a great number of ways. Some adhere to a singular god, others an entire pantheon. Some believers take comfort in the concept of an afterlife removed from the challenges of the mortal realm, while others expect to be reincarnated for another go at it. But one thing is common among all faiths, and it's right there in said label—faith, the act of trusting in that which cannot be proven via any scientific methods known to man. But what if the divine was tangible? What if you could feel the weight of it in your hands, or even carry on a conversation with supernatural beings? It's this curious notion that lands us square in the lap of *Gingitsune: Messenger Fox of the Gods,* studio Diomedéa's anime adaptation of Sayori Ochiai's slice-of -ife manga of the same name, in which seeing truly is believing.

Makoto Saeki is an ordinary girl with an extra-ordinary gift. You see, Makoto descends from a line of Shinto shrine keepers that have been tending to the small and humble Saeki Inari Shrine, one of many shrines scattered across Japan built in honor of Inari, the god of foxes—

By Kristina Potts

FOX on the run



© Sayori Ochiai, SHUEISHA, GINGITSUNE Partners

this one specifically dedicated to the deity Uka-no-Mitama, god of agriculture, who is associated with Inari. With that lineage comes a very special ability. A true successor to a Shinto shrine in the world of *Gingitsune* is bestowed with The Sight, which allows one to see heralds, messengers of the gods, and when Makoto's mother, the previous successor, passes away, Makoto inherits this remarkable skill at the tender age of four. And thus we, and she, are introduced to Gintaro, our titular "silver fox," the meaning of "Gingitsune." But for a being that acts as a go-between for the humans and gods, Gintaro isn't exactly as heavenly as you may imagine. He's lazy, preferring to wile his days away napping, and puts on an air of surliness even though he's a softie deep down, helping to raise Makoto every bit as much as her widower father, Tatsuo. As for his power to predict the future and divine other information, that's just too much of a pain, ain't it? What's a fox gotta do to get some peace and quiet?

Perhaps Gin, as Makoto calls him, should request an offering of earplugs, since happenings only get more boisterous, as new friends are welcomed into their lives. When Makoto isn't performing duties as a part-time shrine maiden and chewing out Gintaro for being a grouch, she attends high school like any other teenager. It's there she meets classmates Yumi Ikegami, an animal lover who manages to be popular despite her headstrong nature, and Hiwako Funabashi, the haughty daughter of an affluent politician. Even though Makoto is about as sweet as they come, she doesn't quite get off on the right foot with these girls, and tenser interactions yet are in her future when she meets Satoru Kamio, another true successor, and his Inari shrine's feisty little brat of a herald, Haru. Like Makoto, Satoru gained The Sight at an unusually young age, but life circumstances have caused Satoru to build walls around himself, retreating from contact with other humans.



Minor characters come and go, such as Hiwako's driver and Yumi's boyfriend, not to mention a whole slew of other heralds, but here we have our main cast. And honestly, not a great deal happens to them. The drama occurring over the 12-episode run of *Gingitsune* rarely gets any severer than a lost cat or a bad tummy ache, and there are no placard-worthy accomplishments made by this crew, either. However, each character does grow in his or her own subtle way, and those small strides in life are oftentimes the most valuable, as they carry one forward step by step.

Much can be learned from the slow-and-steady approach to life seen in *Gingitsune,* and more yet can be garnered from its seemingly



Kami 101

Inari is one of the most prominent gods within the Shinto faith, but if you consume anime with a voracious appetite, there are good odds that you've heard about others in passing, if not extensively. Being targeted first and foremost at a Japanese audience, most anime is created with the assumption that the viewer will possess at least a rudimentary knowledge of Japanese culture, history, and legends, so let's take a moment to bone up on Shinto gods. It is said that Izanagi and his wife/sister Izanami gave birth to the islands of Japan, along with the sun goddess Amaterasu, the moon god Tsukuyomi, and the god of the sea, Susanoo. Outside of this family we have Sarutahiko, god of the Shinto faith itself, and his wife, Ame-no-Uzume, goddess of merriment, who famously cajoled Amaterasu out of the Ama-no-Iwato, a cave to which Amaterasu retreated after quarreling with her brother Susanoo. Amaterasu going into hiding cast the world into darkness, so thanks to her efforts to restore light to Earth, Ame-no-Uzume is also recognized as the goddess of dawn. Some of these deities and events are referenced in *Gingitsune,* so consider this a quick-and-dirty guide to boost your comprehension of not only this anime but numerous others that pay homage to this ancient Japanese religion, which, to this day, remains the most widely practiced religion in the country, although it is often practiced in combination with Buddhism, another topic touched upon in *Gingitsune.*

THOSE SEEKING WARM AND FUZZY FEELINGS TO SURVIVE THE COLD WINTER MONTHS AHEAD COULD DO WORSE THAN TO SNUGGLE UP WITH A BIG, FLUFFY, ALBEIT GRUMPY, SILVER FOX.







deliberate teachings. *Gingitsune* gives off an educational vibe, as if to speak to the youth of Japan who may not be well-versed in the practices of Shinto shrines. The average Western viewer likely knows even less about the Shinto faith, so those looking to expand their minds need only watch and listen. Although, like its plot, there are gaps that go unfilled, with some figures and rituals name dropped without explanation.

Gingitsune is literally a slice of life, in that we are never treated to the whole picture. Intriguing plot points are raised but dropped, most notably the matter of Gintaro's absent partner. We are made privy to bits and pieces of the past that aren't explored to a satisfying degree. The viewer is left hanging on these loose ends, and while a second season could rectify this, no such announcement has been made thus far. Those who want to cling to hope can take solace in the fact that the *Gingitsune* manga is still ongoing and, in time, could build up enough material for future animation.

One can only hope that if *Gingitsune* is continued that it will live up to the animation already available, which is quite easy on the eyes. Human character designs are relatively simplistic and sport soft, pudgy faces, meanwhile the more heavily stylized heralds come in all shapes and sizes, with some resembling actual animals and others anthropomorphized. But what appears to have been graced with the most concerted effort is the background art. From the idyllic Japanese countryside to the detailed shrine architecture, *Gingitsune* portrays a city that cherishes the past as much as it embraces the future. A delicate, gentle soundtrack suits the visuals and plot nicely, as it invokes memories of days gone by and moments you wish could last forever.

As a heartfelt, family-friendly series that mixes the mystical and the mundane, tradition and modern life, Studio Ghibli fans would likely find much to love in *Gingitsune,* even if it, as to be expected, isn't nearly on the same level of beauty, charm, and poignancy. But to make such a comparison at all says much about *Gingitsune.* Those seeking warm and fuzzy feelings to survive the cold winter months ahead could do worse than to snuggle up with a big, fluffy, albeit grumpy, silver fox.

Gingitsune: Messenger Fox of the Gods **is available from Crunchyroll and Sentai Filmworks.**





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the Young and the Restless

Your Lie in April might just sweep you clear off your feet.

By Ink

It's the spring of his 14th year. Kousei Arima should be living a life full of color and warmth along with his friends in middle school, but something's wrong. Everything appears monochrome to this former child prodigy. He hasn't been able to properly play through an entire piano piece since his mother's death three years ago. As his friends experience youth full throttle with twinkling eyes, Kousei plays along while concealing an inner listlessness that seems utterly irreconcilable ... until he comes across a girl who paints cherry blossom petals pink and the sky bright blue.

If there was ever an anime to counter the argument that youth is wasted on the young, *Your Lie in April* (*Shigatsu wa Kimi no Uso*) is it. The very premise is one of appreciation—that the world is abundant with beauty to those who engage with exuberance whatever it is that speaks to them. Since the cast of this noitaminA show is a bunch of 14-year-olds, of course love comes up as the crayon/marker/daubed paintbrush, but there's also soul enrichment via investment in musical performance and even sports. In short, this is a story about kids who live passionately and how doing so literally colors their perceptions.

Colorful Characters

Early on, the series establishes and grows dynamic core characters that foster greater interest in their world via the insight their each and every interaction lends. Tsubaki Sawabe, an outgoing, caring, softball-playing, childhood friend of Kousei, is not afraid to speak her mind, no matter the topic, so long as she thinks it's for Kousei's own good. Ryota Watari, a ladies' man and soccer team captain who loves to play the field, is another school chum of Kousei and always seems to have his best interests at heart regarding matters thereof. While Tsubaki and Watari are very important to Kousei's life, it's very evident they have lives of their own. The intermittent and random divulgences of Watari's on-screen, single-sided phone calls with his off-screen romances, along with Tsubaki's afterschool meanderings, lend an incredible roundness to these supporting characters while tainting their ties to Kousei with an impressive subtlety. As executed within this series, however, even the blunt is beautiful.

© Naoshi Arakawa, Kodansha / Your Lie in April Committee

The life of this show, Kaori Miyazono, is a perpetual dream without a destination. She's a free spirit, a talented and feisty youth fully invested in whatever she's doing/feeling at any given moment. This violinist brings something to Kousei's here-and-now that none of his other friends can: life through music. It's the last cord to which Kousei desperately clings as his defining fabric of self and the very same essence he's forgotten how to appreciate. When he first espies her, Kaori's mania manifests via a playground melodica performance, where she, as if in some vibrant dreamscape, summons birds down amid whirling sakura petals through her spritely playing to delight the children accompanying her. Even though her character largely exists as an extended hand to Kousei, the light in which Kaori is cast makes her a muse to the struggling pianist and thereby almost excuses her as an example of the manic pixie dream girl archetype. Besides, Kaori's constant sparkle—her lust for life and appreciation for everything therein—both balances Kousei's muted outlook and makes any scene wherein she appears pure eye glue for viewers.



Keep Your Eyes Peeled

While the painted world certainly does not hold back on vivacious color, the animation (production by A-1 Pictures) sees ... sparing use. Most of the time, still pans hold their own as backgrounds to monologues and can be taken in more for mood than mirror without too much distraction. There are other times, however, like when still hands pose above a piano being tickled, where the lack of movement is maddening. But then there are instances where subsequent scenes employ limited animation to make even later scenes with more lavish efforts all the more pronounced. This works especially well in Episode 2 regarding Kaori's performance and in other episodes to represent intimacy. The animation quality is nowhere near *Kids on the Slope*, but how what animation there is comes to be leveraged might just be a bit of minimalist genius (or at least shrewd allocation).

Another very easily overlooked quality of this show is its use of shadow. I'm not talkin' noir, but in a series so focused on color, the opposite is leveraged for wonderful symbolism. Consider Kaori as color for her own vitality and





ONLINE EXCLUSIVE:
Beyond the feature we have a look at more of the *Your Lie in April* anime. Catch up with us over at **www.otakuusamagazine.com**!





Kaori & Jackie

The fictional violinist Kaori Miyazono seems to draw many traits from English cellist Jacqueline du Pré, who was "adored for the intense emotional connection she made with her audiences" (Laurence Vittes, *Strings,* Sept. 2012. Web). Breaking convention through her whirlwind presence and impassionate playing, Kaori wins over not only the animated figures in her world but the fleshy ones of our own. This is immediately evident via the depiction of her accentuated movement, which is something du Pré so famously brought to the classical stage. And while having long blonde hair might seem a shallow connection, that aspect imparts upon Kaori a foreign aesthetic and implies an international connection with her otherwise fellow national Kousei. Did I mention that blonde du Pré fell in love with Daniel Barenboim, a black-haired Argentinian ... who was also a talented pianist? All the parallels, evident if you read Barenboim's 1991 autobiography, are wonderful touches if only a bit foreboding considering Kaori suffers from fainting spells and du Pré fell victim to MS. If *Your Lie in April* has truly turned Jacqueline du Pré into a Japanese teenager, there might be many heart strings tugged at, if not broken, before the series ends.

Your Lie in April is a whirlwind of a watch, as charming and gleeful as it is tender and intimate—a thoroughly balanced dramedy fit, if not mandated, for a marathon.



Kousei as shadow for his melancholy. Not only does this reflect the premise of the show and portray Kaori as the foil for Kousei, but such effects as the outlines of shadow created by light and vice-versa as well as how and when characters enter or exit from shadows can be extremely important for representing characters' mind-sets.

On a lighter but similar note, comedic timing is essential in a dramedy. In *YLiA,* the drama (including the score and choice classical pieces) sucks you in and pins you down, but a playful blend of overexaggerated and realistic art, animation techniques, and voice acting provides the comic relief that reminds you to breathe and laugh. While the balance of these aspects is reminiscent of *Kamisama Kiss, YLiA* uses it more naturally and more effectively with an effortless feel.

Showing Its Shonen Colors

Your Lie in April, as an anime adaptation of Naoshi Arakawa's shonen manga, is all about adeptly building its inner ring of core characters and their relationships within a rom-com/dramedy atmosphere ... until the end of Episode 6. As part of Kaori's efforts to bring Kousei into the light, he will face at least two people in musical battle. This will evolve the show's focus on character growth (typically a shojo affair) into a concentration on character capability. Face-offs between backgrounded competitors currently more proficient than the protagonist are bound to reap comparisons of playing styles, techniques, power moves, etc. It'll be interesting to see if the series can keep the amazing amount of heart it's built while executing this change in focus.

As of this review, only seven episodes have aired. The first swept me clear off my feet, and I've waited weekly for each new episode with great anticipation. By the time this issue hits the stands (April, coincidentally), this 22-episode series will either be just about over or just starting its second half. I suggest catching up on crunchyroll.com either way.

Your Lie in April is a whirlwind of a watch, as charming and gleeful as it is tender and intimate—a thoroughly balanced dramedy fit, if not mandated, for a marathon.

***Your Lie in April* is available from Sentai Filmworks.**





© Naoshi Arakawa, Kodansha / Your Lie in April Committee

Knights of Sidonia is a curiosity through and through. On one hand, it's a mech title that seeks to transcend the cartoony feeling of the others on the market. On the other, it's the first anime series ever to have been exclusively licensed for release as a Netflix Original Series. Those are grounds enough alone to consider it radar worthy, but they certainly aren't the only reasons. The adaptation of a manga series from Tsutomu Nihei (*Biomega, Blame!*) is a fantastic watch, with an excellent English dub, presentation, and plot that holds up fantastically throughout the season's first 12 episodes. In a genre overrun by moe blob madness and recycled slice-of-life series that rely on the same tired tropes to tell the same stories season after season, *Knights of Sidonia* is an intriguing adventure that attempts to deliver a wholly unique experience and absolutely succeeds.

A Digital Future

Netflix did well to yank *Knights of Sidonia* from the subbed anime sphere for American audiences. One season of the series was released after the original aired in Japan, and all episodes were made available at once, with both Spanish and English dub tracks and subtitled options in addition to the regular Japanese audio with subtitles. It's an interesting endeavor to be sure, possibly heralding the beginning of a new way for fans to consume anime in the West, though hopefully not each and every release an entire season after the fact in the future.

But it was worth the wait for what seems like a typical mecha series at first. One special pilot (Nagate Tanikaze) is picked out of the rest of the crop to become humanity's last hope against a series of aliens with whom communication is nigh impossible. They're called the Gauna, and they're able to shapeshift as well as possessing other pesky qualities that make them such an enormous threat to humanity. The only way humanity has thrived at all is by way of special spaceship behemoths floating above, like the titular *Sidonia*, which has its own bizarre human culture on board. Some of the richer inhabitants claim immortality, but in a settlement of over 500,000 people, it's the last place in the universe humanity exists.

Tanikaze has grown up in the underground area of *Sidonia* and that's all he truly knows, having trained with mechanized weapons known as Guardians instead of interacting with people. As such, he's extremely gifted, becoming a revered Guardian pilot after heading to the surface. He's charged with protecting *Sidonia* from the Gauna's oncoming advances, which may be a more monumental task than our hero thought previously.

Sidonia as Paradise

While one could argue that *Knights of Sidonia* is still rife with tropes readily available within the realm of mecha anime, it's arguably the massive spaceship itself that carries the series. Notably, the population of *Sidonia* is capable of photosynthesis. We're talking about humans having been bio-engineered to operate like plants, which means cloning is standard, reproduction is done asexually, and humans only need sustenance once a week. It's a bizarre set of circumstances, especially when you consider the fact that one of the largest subplots of *Sidonia*



Space Is the Place!

By Brittany Vincent

Knights of Sidonia offers raw strangeness and a glimpse of humanity's future.



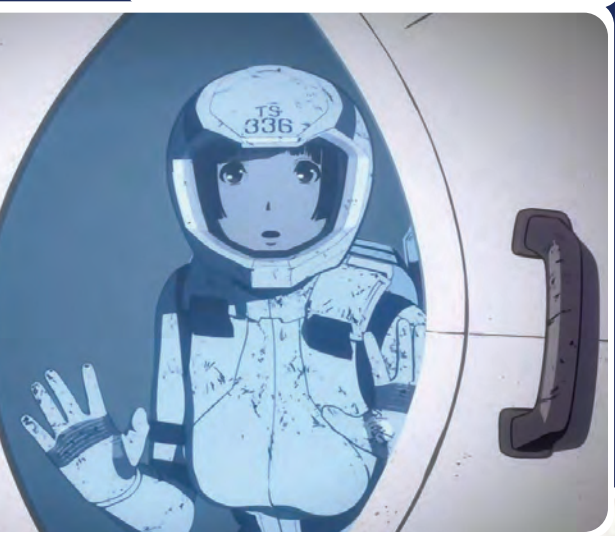






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is indeed a romance between our protagonist Tanikaze and Guardian pilot Izana Shinatose.

These circumstances lend a decidedly alien feel that permeates every corner of the show, reminding you at every turn that this could be humanity's fate, but simultaneously keeping its distance just far enough away to remain a sci-fi fantasy. Along with these iniquities, the cast of characters remains enigmatic, including one pilot in particular who can voluntarily choose his/her own gender depending on the circumstances. And then there's the issue of actual immortal human beings, and the fact that the very idea is reserved for only the most elite of society, with the information protected and restricted as to not leak to the general public.

So while there are elements that lend a realistic feel to *Sidonia,* all of these aspects tend to act as constant reminders that what you're watching is truly alien in nature. That's part of why it's such a spectacular ride, its snippets of raw strangeness and glimpses of a future for humanity that seem so hard to believe that it's more in the realm of fantasy than sci-fi. But it's always fun to think about these "what if" scenarios, nevertheless.

A Distinctive Look and Aural Delights

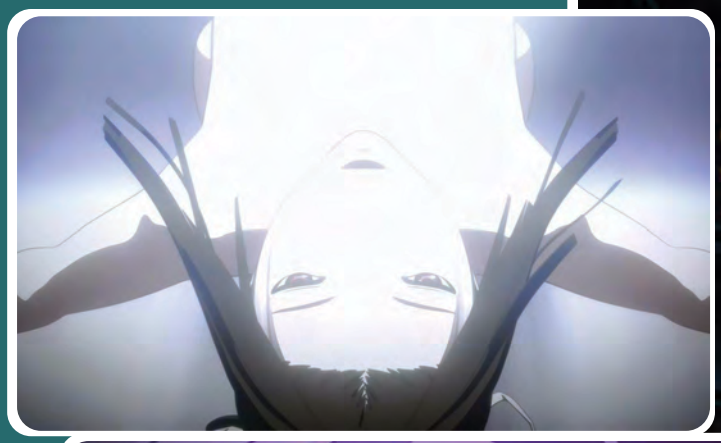
Aside from a host of differences in the narrative and characters from modern sci-fi anime, *Knights of Sidonia* employs a very unique CG art style that makes it immediately recognizable and sets it apart from the rest. Because the CG is capable of complex animations that simplify depicting explosions with debris, action sequences that utilize slow-motion, and other difficult mechanics that don't always work well with traditional animation, it lends a surrealistic feel to the show. While faces and expressions naturally don't do as well, the CG animation works beautifully when it comes to illustrating the bleak future of humanity, lending an interesting lilt to both human characters and the aliens themselves.

What's more, there's a refreshing dearth of fanservice, which is appreciated in some series, but would feel eerily out of place and bizarre here, where humanity is dwindling and sex really isn't the first thing on anyone's minds—it's not even required, remember. Of course, given the fact that the visuals can be downright graphic, the computer-generated artwork goes a long way to display it all, every gory little detail.

With sharp visuals comes a fantastic soundtrack, with an opening and closing that channel the hardness and technological feel of the show in equal measures. The actual episodes themselves, however, are accompanied by a score that wouldn't feel out of place in a film like *Interstellar* or another space-themed title, eliciting several different types of feelings from the viewer. A strong English dub cast is integral to making a complete package as well, however, and industry vets Johnny Yong Bosch, Wendee



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Lee, and Todd Haberkorn provide excellent performances and let their own personalities shine through to their characters.

Where Do We Go From Here?

It's important to note that while *Knights of Sidonia* as is remains an engaging product with plenty of reasons to return to it and continue watching even after you've completed one run, the story is still far from over. By the end of the first season you'll still be left with several questions, many of which won't be tidily wrapped up by the time the last episode wraps up. But there's already a second season in the works, with the whole of it beginning to air in winter. There's still plenty to explore on the good ship *Sidonia*, as it comes back around for more of its unique brand of science fiction, chilling and horrific violence, and progressive bits of storytelling that we don't often see in anime. Suit up and get ready for some action.

***Knights of Sidonia* is available on Netflix.**



There's plenty to explore on the good ship Sidonia including science fiction, chilling and horrific violence, and progressive bits of storytelling that we don't often see in anime.

Ultimate Max Battle Requiem

New live-action releases



Gamera: Ultimate Collection (Volume I)

We've come a long way since the reign of US producer and distributor Sandy Frank, when badly cropped and questionably localized versions of Japanese science fiction films were the rule. Now fans can own a slice of giant monster history in high definition, thanks to Mill Creek Entertainment's Blu-ray release of the Showa Era *Gamera* films. But is the promise of a giant serving of turtle soup worth the price of admission?



DISTRIBUTOR
Mill Creek Entertainment

ORIGINALLY RELEASED
1965-1968

RUNNING TIME
325 Minutes

Gamera: The Giant Monster, directed by Noriaki Yuasa, assaults the world with a fire-breathing, fire-eating, flying saucer-imitating, Atlantean turtle of truly epic proportions. *Gamera vs. Barugon*, directed by Shigeo Tanaka, involves a criminal conspiracy to rob a peaceful island village of a legendary gem that is actually the egg of a ferocious giant monster. In *Gamera vs. Gyaos*, also directed by Yuasa, an unexpected tectonic shift makes Mount Fuji erupt, awakening a terrible, vampiric creature from its ancient slumber. And in *Gamera vs. Viras*, again directed by Yuasa, a pair of Boy Scouts foil an alien invasion using only their wits, their trusty lasso, and their friendship with a 60-meter-tall chelonian who loves children and hates alien squid monsters.

Despite 12 films produced over a period of more than 40 years (not including a rumored reboot currently in development), and despite a cadre of dedicated and vocal fans, Daiei's Gamera remains the black sheep of the daikaiju eiga family, doomed to lurk in the shadow of his older, more popular cousin from Toho Studios: Godzilla. But while the Godzilla films routinely receive more recognition, the Gamera movies of the Showa Era have plenty to offer. The monster suit designs are weird and angular, with profiles that are sharp edged and strangely geometric. This distinguishes the Gamera monsters from the more humanoid creatures created by Eiji Tsuburaya's production company for the Godzilla films. The Gamera films are also surprisingly gruesome. When they fight, the monsters dismember and impale one another, inflicting grievous wounds that gush torrents of green, pink, or purple blood. The effect is visceral and compelling. The miniature work and pyrotechnics are excellent, conveying a sense of scale and gravity to the devastation wreaked when the monsters rampage through the cities and the countryside. And although the plots can be paper thin, the dialogue can be clunky with exposition, and the denouements can be burdened with deus ex machina developments, these films all possess a sense of boundless creativity that is brazen and highly infectious. Even the shameless manner in which *Gamera vs. Viras* cribs vast swathes of stock footage from earlier films while the evil aliens scan the giant turtle's







memory has a certain ineffable charm to it.

As for the collection itself, it's a bare bones affair. All four films are squeezed onto a single Blu-ray disc. No English-dubbed versions of any of the films are included. The only language option available is Japanese with optional English subtitles, and the subtitling is markedly inferior to earlier Mill Creek releases, such as the *Daimajin* collection or the *Gamera: Guardian of the Universe* trilogy. I noticed numerous examples of spelling and grammatical mistakes, odd syntax, poor timing, and even entire chunks of dialogue that simply weren't translated. This is not the level of quality I expect from a commercial release. There are no bonus features—no interviews, no commentary tracks, no special effects retrospectives, etc. This is strictly a no-frills archival edition of the films. So the question remains: if one already owns the superb Shout! Factory DVD releases, is this new Blu-ray version sufficient justification to upgrade? Maybe. Maybe not. The price is quite reasonable, retailing at approximately $20 and available through online vendors for a fraction of that cost. These single-disc collections also take up less shelf space, which is a constant concern for the hardcore collector. But don't expect to see a significant increase in video or audio fidelity just because these films are published in a high definition format; the picture and sound quality aren't noticeably better here compared to the previous remastered releases.

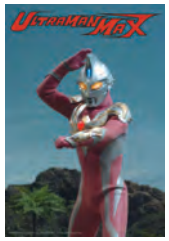
- Paul Thomas Chapman





Ultraman Max

The Ultra Series has never had much luck breaking into the American market. While we had English-dubbed *Ultraman* and *Ultraseven,* Eiji Tsuburaya's giant superhero from The Land of Light never achieved the staying power enjoyed by its contemporaries like Godzilla or Super Sentai via Saban's *Power Rangers* franchise. But as more studios and networks turned to online distribution, American fans only hoped that somehow Tsuburaya Productions would join the brawl. A few months ago, the dream came true when it was announced that *Ultraman Max* would be available to stream on Crunchyroll. I think I woke up the house by how loudly I freaked out. Because of all the shows to get, *Ultraman Max* was the perfect choice, being both a fan favorite and the perfect gateway series for new fans.



DISTRIBUTOR
Crunchyroll

ORIGINALLY RELEASED
2005-2006

RUNNINE TIME
1,200 Minutes

Broadcast in 2005, *Ultraman Max* was a return to form for the Ultra Series following an experimental streak with *Ultraman Nexus. Max* takes place in the not-too-distant future of planet Earth where, suddenly, giant monsters and strange phenomenon are becoming more frequent. To protect the world from these new threats, Team DASH sets out with their high-tech arsenal to save the day. But when their efforts aren't enough, Kaito, the team's new rookie, rises to the occasion and transforms into the titular giant from Nebula M-78, Ultraman Max!



Max is a show that comes off a bit dated. Which is saying something as it's only been nine years since its original broadcast. But by that, I'm talking about the way the show was approached, which was a balance of the spirit of the original Showa Era Ultra shows that fans fell in love and modern times and tech. You can't go into this show expecting complexity, overarching storylines, or character development. Much like the original *Ultraman, Max* is largely self-contained with its stories. While the CG blend isn't perfect, *Max* does manage a balance in the spirit of the old with modern times. There are no real long-term villains, just monsters of the week who are all unique in their threats. For the first time in years, it's all about the fantasy and adventure again.

There are those who may be turned off by the more formulaic aspects of *Max,* but I guarantee that you'll find yourself enjoying it on some level, even if it's the nostalgia for watching rubber-suited monsters beating the snot out of each other. And it's that very nostalgia and love for the original that fuels this series. Case in point, the classic monsters that were brought back: King Joe and Eleking from *Ultraseven* make appearances early on backed by new digital effects that make them more amazing than ever. From *Ultraman,* fan-favorite monsters like Baltan, Gomora, and Red King return for some of the best episodes of the series, and arch-nemesis Zetton appears for a gripping two-parter guest starring *Hurricanger*'s Nao Nagasawa.

One of the main selling points of the show, though, was the inclusion of several big-



ONLINE EXCLUSIVE:

Crunchyroll keeps adding more Ultraman to its streaming stable, and we keep watching it! Read our thoughts on some of the other Ultra-offerings over at **www.otakuusamagazine.com**!

name directors, namely Takashi Miike and Shusuke Kaneko. Miike is best known to Japanese cinema fans for directing films like *Ichi The Killer, Zebraman,* and the *Ace Attorney* adaptation. In *Ultraman Max,* he directs Episode 15, "Miracle of the Third Planet," and 16, "Who Am I?" Both episodes are like night and day due to the former being straight-up drama and the latter being one of the funniest episodes of the series. Meanwhile, Kaneko, the director of the Heisei Gamera Trilogy, *Godzilla, Mothra, King Ghidorah: All Monsters All-Out Attack,* and *Death Note* gets four episodes of the series. Among this batch was a remake of the "Blue Stone of Baraj," a story from *Ultraman.* This episode is a must for Gamera fans, if only for the scene in the beginning where two children fight using their Gamera and Godzilla toys!

Ultraman Max promised a show with "Max Power!," "Max Speed!," and a lot of other things with "Max" in them. Looking back after all these years, I can say it delivered on that promise. This is the series I recommend people watch to get into the Ultra Series for being that perfect blend of old and new. It's also a labor of love by fans to fans, highlighting all the fun and excitement that one comes to expect from an Ultraman show. An old friend once said,"Tsuburaya is tokusatsu, Toei just makes it"; this is the show that reinforces that statement and then some.

- Mike Dent

Battle Royale 2: Requiem

The bloodbath that began in *Battle Royale* continues in *Battle Royale 2: Requiem.* Three years after surviving the slaughter of his classmates in a sadistic display of autocratic power by the Japanese government, Shuya Nanahara is a wanted man. Determined to wage war against the adults responsible, Shuya forms Wild Seven, a terrorist cell composed of former "Battle Royale" survivors. But the rules of the game have changed, and the Japanese government isn't about to sit idly by when they've still got plenty of innocent children to throw into the meat grinder.



DISTRIBUTOR
Netflix

ORIGINALLY RELEASED
2003

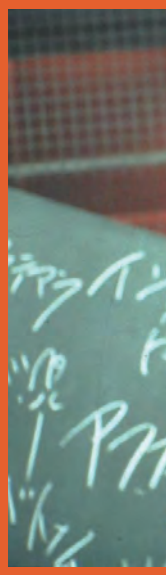
RUNNING TIME
133 Minutes

Requiem is a film with a pedigree. Veteran filmmaker Kinji Fukasaku directed the original *Battle Royale* film, which was based on the novel by Koushun Takami. Kenta Fukasaku, Kinji's son, wrote the screenplays for both the first *Battle Royale* movie and the sequel film. It's impossible to analyze *Battle Royale 2: Requiem* without comparing it to *Battle Royale,* and the comparisons are not flattering. Whereas the controversial *Battle Royale* is lionized as a masterpiece, *Battle Royale 2: Requiem* is almost universally reviled, although it's arguable whether the film truly deserves all the scorn that it receives. *Requiem* is not a poorly composed film, merely a poorly scripted one. Kinji Fukasaku experienced firsthand the horrors of World War II. He admitted in interviews that the awful things that he lived through left him with a deep-seated distrust of adults and authority figures, and this shows in *Battle Royale.* It's clear that Kenta Fukasaku does not have the same sort of experiences to draw on, and his film suffers for it.

Without Takami's novel to serve as a foundation, Kenta Fukasaku takes the characters and storyline in a bizarre direction. Everything about *Battle Royale 2* is an inversion. The rules of the killing game are different. Instead of being forced to murder their classmates, the sacrificed school children instead are issued weapons and sent off as child soldiers to weaken Wild Seven before the real military arrives to mop up. The imagery is different. *Battle Royale* reveled in the mundane, whereas *Requiem* is all about the extravagant. Kitano, the antagonist of the first film played by Takeshi Kitano, was an unassuming figure. He could have been your next door neighbor, yet he blithely sent the students in his charge to their pointless and horrific deaths. Kitano was a perfect expression of the banality of evil. The chief antagonist in *Requiem,* on the other hand, is a prancing lunatic (Riki Takeuchi!) in a Gestapo duster who mugs and struts like a vaudeville villain. He's a cartoon. The evil military forces are lit with a garish green color scheme, whereas the heroic resistance fighters get the warm yellow light of hundreds of candles. *Battle Royale* is essentially a horror film. *Requiem* is a war movie, complete with swelling orchestral music and heroic last stands. The ending of *Battle Royal* is bleak and ambiguous. *Requiem* gets an ending that is







both happy and completely impossible, and I don't think that Kenta Fukasaku was aiming for farce here, because there's hardly a scrap of irony within *Requiem.*

It takes guts to cloak your protagonists in the mantle of terrorist organizations. It takes guts to open your film with collapsing skyscrapers in a Post 9-11 world. But guts are meaningless without something coherent to say. *Battle Royale 2: Requiem* is an overtly political film, but it lacks a clear message,





and this is cinematic poison. Much has been said already about the anti-American sentiment in *Requiem,* but my objection to this content taking center stage in the middle of the the movie has nothing to do with patriotism and everything to do with the derailment of the narrative thrust of the film. Kinji Fukasaku was an accomplished director. His work casts a long shadow. I don't feel that Kenta Fukasaku demonstrates enough directorial vision with *Requiem* to escape that shadow.

- Paul Thomas Chapman

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Tales of Hearts R

A worthwhile RPG remake

The *Tales* series is consistently popular in both the West and in Japan, prompting new titles and localizations even when it seems as though there are quite a few releasing from year to year. Of course, there are several holes in the localization schedule in the West given the fact that the series only recently hit its stride here in the States. What better time to re-release previous entries in the series now that all eyes are on the venerable JRPG franchise? *Tales of Hearts R* is a Vita remake of a Nintendo DS adventure that never saw an American release, and the short of it? It's a solid entry in a familiar series, and one that you should add to your collection.



PUBLISHER
Bandai Namco Games

DEVELOPER
Bandai Namco Games

SYSTEM(S)
PS Vita

AVAILABLE
Now

RATING
T

After a young girl's "spiria" is shattered and she loses the ability to feel and show emotions, protagonist Kor has to venture forth and recover pieces of her heart in order to restore the girl's feelings. It's a little bit lacking in the plot department, but the premise is touching when you consider the fact that a girl's actual feelings are at stake.

Where the game truly sparkles (and it's the same for most of the *Tales* games) is in its combat system. Much like the other games, this is where the game is basically made or broken, and luckily *Tales of Hearts R* passes this test with flying colors. What really drives the fun home is the Chase system, which allows for strings of devastating attacks launched on enemies that you've stunned and otherwise knocked into the defensive position. It's fast paced, frenetic, and lively, and though there are a decent amount of random battles to contend with, it never feels like the slog that so many other RPGs do, and that's one major point in its favor.

There's no English voice track, but the subtitles do a decent enough job bringing this adventure to life. It's a crystal clear and gorgeous HD remake with absolutely breathtaking anime cutscenes interspersed between the regular game, but unfortunately a good bit of them actually retain the DS's aspect ratio while some appear to have been created specifically for the Vita. It's a little bizarre, especially considering this is supposed to be a full-fledged remake from the ground up, but not so jarring that it's hard to get used to.

Tales of Hearts R isn't a perfect remake, but it's a perfectly serviceable handheld adventure that feels right at home as a part of any JRPG fan's library, especially if you've been following the rest of the releases. Grab this one as well, since it never made its way Stateside as a DS title.

- Brittany Vincent





Freedom Wars

Cool setup, squandered potential



PUBLISHER
Sony Computer Entertainment

DEVELOPER
SCE Japan Studio, Shift, Dimps

SYSTEM(S)
PS Vita

AVAILABLE
Now

RATING
T

Freedom Wars may well have one of the most interesting video game premises of the year. Picture an Earth in ruins, where babies are born and immediately labeled "sinners" just for emerging from their mother's womb. A 1,000,000-year sentence is placed upon all children at birth since the once resource rich planet is now but a husk of its former self. Sinners must fight for their own survival, serving their Panopticon (instead of their city) and earning their freedom. It's one of the best setups you'll hear about all year for a Vita game, and yet it's wasted on a lackluster title that had an overwhelming amount of potential.

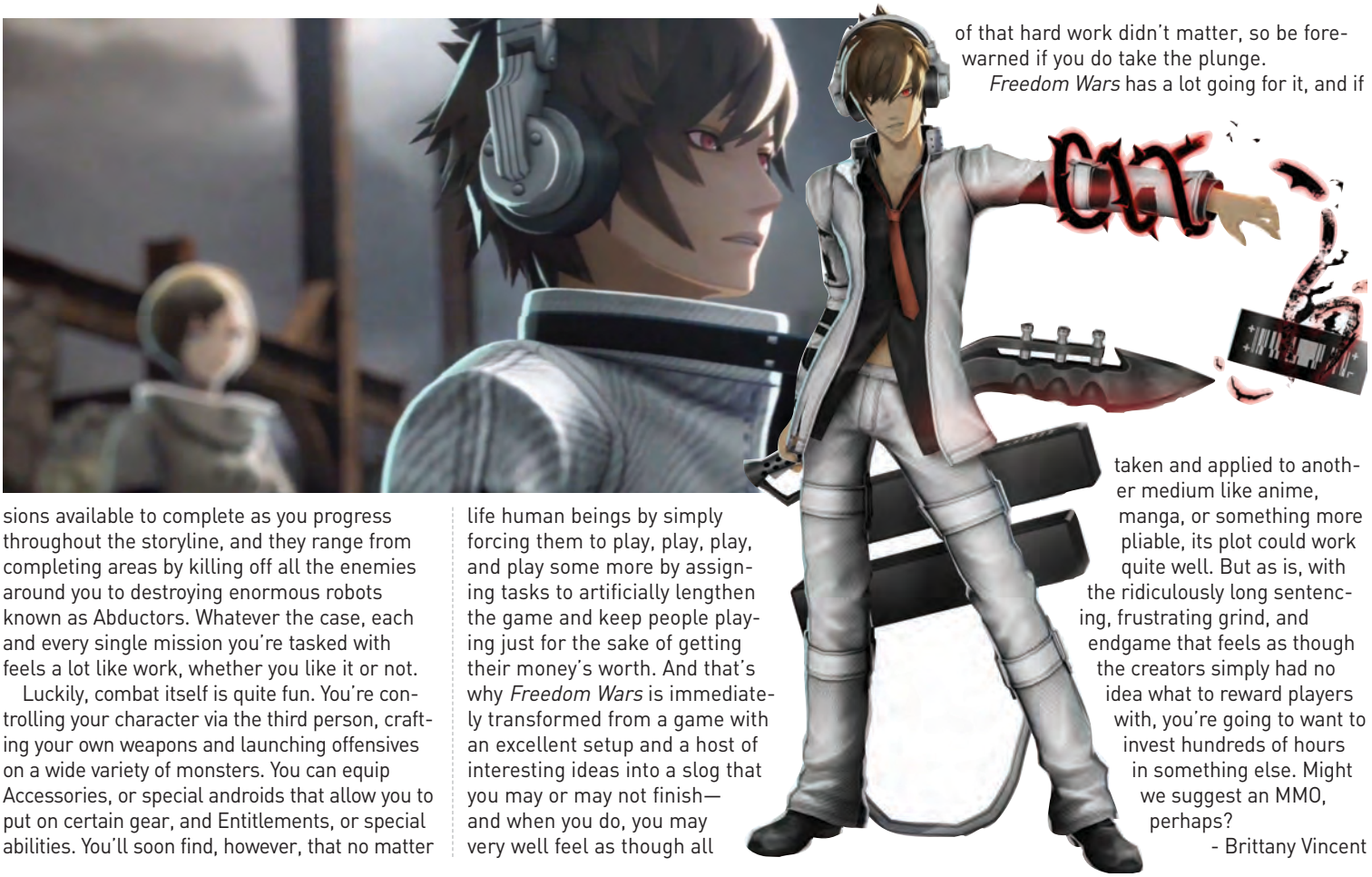
This is a game all about grinding, as you'll soon come to find out. It's all for knocking some time off of your sentence, which is essentially what you're working to do your entire life. To do this, you're going to need to fight, fight, fight, and fight some more. There are several missions available to complete as you progress throughout the storyline, and they range from completing areas by killing off all the enemies around you to destroying enormous robots known as Abductors. Whatever the case, each and every single mission you're tasked with feels a lot like work, whether you like it or not.

Luckily, combat itself is quite fun. You're controlling your character via the third person, crafting your own weapons and launching offensives on a wide variety of monsters. You can equip Accessories, or special androids that allow you to put on certain gear, and Entitlements, or special abilities. You'll soon find, however, that no matter how fun the fights may be at first, they quickly begin to devolve into some of the most frustrating things in the world. That sentence may lower here and there, but it definitely doesn't go quick enough to justify how much time you're going to be spending simply grinding to make things work.

While this works well within the confines of the post-apocalyptic setting in which you feel as though nearly every single thing you do in-game is worthy of punishment, in real life it doesn't work as well as it does in theory. You can't punish real-life human beings by simply forcing them to play, play, play, and play some more by assigning tasks to artificially lengthen the game and keep people playing just for the sake of getting their money's worth. And that's why *Freedom Wars* is immediately transformed from a game with an excellent setup and a host of interesting ideas into a slog that you may or may not finish—and when you do, you may very well feel as though all of that hard work didn't matter, so be forewarned if you do take the plunge.





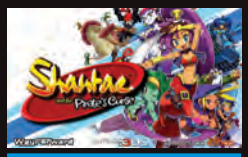


Freedom Wars has a lot going for it, and if taken and applied to another medium like anime, manga, or something more pliable, its plot could work quite well. But as is, with the ridiculously long sentencing, frustrating grind, and endgame that feels as though the creators simply had no idea what to reward players with, you're going to want to invest hundreds of hours in something else. Might we suggest an MMO, perhaps?

- Brittany Vincent

Shantae and the Pirate's Curse

Another step in the right direction



PUBLISHER
WayForward

DEVELOPER
WayForward, Inti Creates

SYSTEM(S)
Nintendo 3DS, Wii U

AVAILABLE
Now

RATING
E10+

Shantae, the world-exploring platformer starring a sassy half-genie with Kabuki Quantum Fighter hair prowess, has always felt just short of brilliant, a rut many WayForward games stick themselves into. The series is gregarious and high spirited, qualities that often feel missing in the wash of modern-day games so focused on blood and guts and world-ending strife, but previous entries on the Gameboy Color and DSi have sported poorly balanced difficulty or humdrum worlds that stopped them from reaching the pinnacle of their *Metroid* aspirations.

Still, they have always been beautiful, and this one is resplendent with WayForward's characteristic sprite work. The whole cast hops and



shimmies, bobs and weaves; and, of course, special attention is given to Shantae, whose whipping hair attacks animate fluidly across tons of frames and whose special maneuvers are needlessly, delightfully opulent: her glide a giant, blossoming pirate hat, her ground pound producing an enormous cutlass out of nowhere to smash through breakable blocks below. Each time a zone hands you a new power up, it's just as fun to see it in use as it is to scour the world

Girlish Grimoire Littlewitch Romanesque: Editio Perfecta

A delicate entrance to the world of eroge



PUBLISHER
JAST USA

DEVELOPER
Littlewitch

SYSTEM(S)
PC

AVAILABLE
Now

RATING
18+

As a purveyor of fine hentai and ecchi games, I was pleasantly surprised to hear of JAST USA's acquisition of the Littlewitch novel *Girlish Grimoire Littlewitch Romanesque: Editio Perfecta,* complete with localization and digital as well as physical release. It's a fantastic alternative to darker, more violent eroge titles on the market, with plenty of girlish charm (as the title implies), positivity, and sexy content that should please both vanilla and experienced H-game players.

After several wars between different factions had left the country in *Girlish Grimoire* in ruins, those using sorcery dwindled out as the ability was seen as more of a murderous talent than anything else. Those with the gifts decide to rebuild the world, and within the Grimoire Magic Academy, warlocks and witches flock from all over the globe to restore and hone their powers so that they might be able to prosper like they once did. Unfortunately, there are those who seek to use magic for evil and more selfish rea-



sons, and Domino, the great warlock of the academy, decides to get away from the abundance of selfish misdeeds from the leagues of witches. That's not exactly kosher, so as punishment for trying to get away he's given the task of training two young students to be proper witches: Aria and Kaya.

Aria and Kaya interact with Domino as well as other bizarre characters they come into contact with as they learn their own lessons and wrestle with what it means to be witches. Said characters act as intriguing possible matches for Domino, though the girls are available for sexual pursuit as well.

But don't mistake this H-game for a montage of humiliation and shame for the girls or



to see what new cracks and crevices you can explore with it.

And scour you will. There's a half-dozen islands to explore, each with its own weird, usually irreverent theme—like a sewer trek to find the fleshy snacks that'll get zombie kids off of your buddy's case, or a desert kingdom whose people's nearsightedness causes them to mistake you for their princess, throwing you into a stealthy escape through the back corridors of the palace. *The Pirate's Curse* is Shantae's most cohesive world. It's also the biggest one yet, and the one with the best niches to explore, but backtracking is an enormous part of the game's runtime. Starting a new island, you can expect it'll send you back to a previous one to find the next doodad or geegaw you need to proceed with the story. These interludes are short, but persistent. The hidden keys are never that hard to find, but with the next dungeon looming promisingly in the distance, you'll often wish the game would just let you get to it and quit with the constant runaround. With every dungeon like a little *Zelda* mystery full of keys, switches, and loot for purchasing upgrades like shampoo and perfume, which let Shantae's hair swipes really shine, you wish more of your time was spent progressing through the next level and less on the fetch quests required to unlock it.

It's fairly short, none of its dungeons more than a half hour or so, but the runtime does it some favors in helping the gameplay feel fresh right up until the end, even with the constant threat of schlepping back to where you just were breathing down your neck. The difficulty is frustrating—lots of "gotcha!" enemy placement—but weirdly easy in spite of itself, since you'll have a dozen different healing items and offensive power ups on you at any given time.



Sometimes its jokes fall flat, and it leans a little heavy on the wink-and-a-nod fanservice, but there's a specific pleasure in playing something that at least attempts to have a sense of humor, and the carefree relationship between Shantae and her nemesis, malefic zombie pirate Risky Boots steals the show, making up for the otherwise bog-standard plot. *The Pirate's Curse* can't go toe to toe with the best *Metroids* and *Castlevanias,* but it takes *Shantae* the closest it's ever been to the exploration platformer it always yearned to be.

- Dave Riley



demeaning sexual advances. (If that's your thing, great, but this game doesn't have much of it.) This is a "girly" eroge every step of the way, with a puzzle game, dating sim, and adventure title combined into one large space. You'll need to ensure the girls learn specific spells and that they attend necessary classes in order to grow, and round out their exploration skills to ensure they come out smelling like roses. It can be difficult to strike a good balance between work, play, and exploration, but once you find it there's a sweet spot you can keep plugging away at to find a play style that fits you like a glove.

Beyond the gentle style of the main game, everything from the artwork to the voiceovers and soundtrack are sugary sweet, with light pastels, whimsical menu details, speech bubbles, and different colors according to the speaker's tone. Omari Ashito's charming character designs are gorgeous and look as though they could have been ripped straight from the likes of a Miyazaki film. On the surface, it looks like it could belong to the *Atelier* series of games from Gust, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with that!

Girlish Grimoire is a softer take on the world of H-games, with meaningful relationships between its characters, a delicate approach that makes more sense given its subject matter, and plenty of reasons to come back and try again if you don't end up getting the outcome you wanted in the first place. It's an excellent choice if you're looking for something a little different from eroge—just don't be surprised if it sucks you in with its girlish charms.



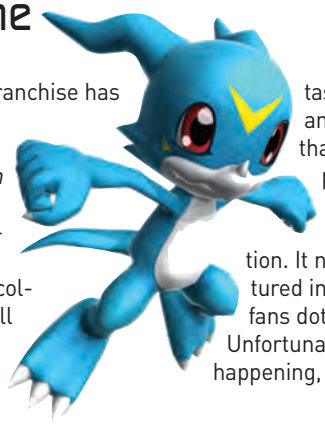
- Brittany Vincent





Digimon: All-Star Rumble

Stick to the anime



Though P*okémon* as a media franchise has continued to grow and evolve over the years while retaining its massive popularity, *Digimon* has all but languished in the West, with scarce game releases and a much smaller fanbase than that of its "monster collecting" anime brethren. It's still an interesting property, however, with some absolutely fantastic anime series and a card game that's still fun to play to this day. It just needs some time and attention. It needs to be nurtured in the same way fans dote on *Pokémon.* Unfortunately, it's just not happening, and *Digimon: All-Star Rumble* is a testament to all the series does wrong, while showcasing what could be done right.



PUBLISHER
Bandai Namco Games

DEVELOPER
Prope

SYSTEM(S)
PlayStation 3, Xbox 360

AVAILABLE
Now

RATING
E10+



It's frustrating to say that nothing has changed since the last English language release, which happened a staggering six years ago, and it's clear that this title, exclusive to Western audiences, needed much more time in the oven before releasing to the general public. Bandai Namco saw fit to ignore releasing the fantastic-looking *Digimon Story Cyber Sleuth* while offering this baffling title instead. In a very

PREVIEW: Final Fantasy Type-0 HD

Portable adventure gets a console makeover





PUBLISHER
Square Enix

DEVELOPER
Square Enix

SYSTEM(S)
Xbox One, PlayStation 4

AVAILABLE
March 2015

RATING
RP





Square Enix has a lot of irons in the fire as far as the flagship *Final Fantasy* franchise is concerned, from an ever-increasing stable of smartphone titles both traditional and simplified to the next major entry in the series proper, *Final Fantasy XV.* And then there's *Final Fantasy Type-0 HD,* which shares a few features with *XV,* including its director, Hajime Tabata. It may have started its life way back in 2011 as a Japan-only PSP game, but it's aiming for something much larger with the upcoming *Final Fantasy Type-0 HD.*

If you've seen any footage of *Type-0 HD* in action, you know Tabata and his team are cook-



kind word, it's disappointing.

Story Mode doesn't even offer a respite from the onslaught of mundane that *All-Star Rumble* contains. It's a few short pages of text that amount to little more than a plot outlining the fact that the Digimon are bored and want to fashion a tournament based around beating the tar out of each other. So they brawl, for no real reason. It's extremely lazy, especially given the fact that the lines of dialogue aren't even voiced.



You can choose from some familiar monsters like Agumon, Veemon, Tentomon, and more from the series that did air in the US as you complete the Digital Monster Evolution Tournament, but it's so lackluster there's really not much drive for you to continue as you attack other Digimon in cramped arenas that feel a lot more like a condensed version of *Super Smash Bros.* than the knockdown, drag-out battles that could occur between these superpowered monsters. Battle Mode gets you into the action quicker than Story Mode, but with lackluster fights and boring combos in tight spaces, there's not much strategy or anything engaging to keep you playing to begin with.

This spiritual predecessor to the *Digimon Rumble Arena* series is not only bland in terms of gameplay, but graphically it's underwhelming as well, with bargain bin mechanics, presentation, and a startling lack of things to do. Even for hardcore *Digimon* fans, there's simply not enough here to justify the entry price. If you're really looking for a *Digimon* title to quench your thirst, you're going to want to stick with an import. This PS3 battler isn't going to impress.

- Brittany Vincent



ing up a port that goes above and beyond the typical HD polish of other enhanced console games. It makes sense that so much is going into this, especially with Tabata previously saying he'd like to make more *Type* games if this one is a success.

During 2014's Paris Games Week, Tabata said, "I would like to make more *Type* games and make them into a *Final Fantasy* series. We've registered trademarks for it, we've gone that far so we want to continue it.... I'd like to make the *Type* series the kind of series where we can do the kind of stuff that we really can't do in the mainline numbered series, to make it a really alternative kind of *Final Fantasy*."

In the meantime, Square Enix gave us another preview of *Final Fantasy Type-0 HD,* which hits PlayStation 4 and Xbox One in North America on March 17, 2015. In addition to the game itself, it'll come packing some major heat in the form of a FFXV demo called *Final Fantasy XV: Episode Duscae.*

- Joseph Luster




LFTDG33K


Aggressive Comix

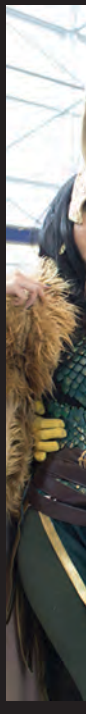


Aggressive Comix



Megaship Cosplay Photography





Cross-Country Cosplay

with Ani-Mia (Mia McLaughlin)

HELLO AGAIN, fellow otaku! This is Ani-Mia! Last fall was a cross-country convention excursion from Portland, Oregon, to hot and humid San Antonio, Texas, and finally ended with the titanic New York Comic Con. It was a whirlwind of climates and cosplays, so let's get started!

Rose City Comic Con in Portland had the widest range of cosplays I'd seen. Beyond the usual mix of anime and comic cosplays, there were so many nostalgic cosplays that you don't see very often (like an entire *Labyrinth* family complete with Hoggle), meticulously created costumes, and some cosplayers who had so much personality they can never be forgotten. My favorite in the costume contest alone was a younger woman cosplaying as Retired Wonder Woman. Not only was every detail completely thought out, with her Colostomy Bag of Truth dangling from her hip, she stayed in character at all times. She transcended from just cosplaying as a character by becoming her. Despite it being just their second year, Rose City Comic Con is a huge up and coming convention with helpful staff, great informational cosplay panels, and unbelievable cosplayers.

Next I visited sunny San Antonio for Alamo City Comic Con. Not only was the area gorgeous (the Riverwalk has the best Mexican food everywhere and you can walk it all off afterward) but the convention itself was twice as big as the previous year, adding more energetic and friendly staff, guests, and programming. It was also an emotional event for many in the TX convention scene during the Cosplay Contest when there was a memorial for local cosplayer Jonathan Vela, otherwise known as San Antonio Aquaman. You





Ron Gejon Photography



Megaship Cosplay Photography



Aggressive Comix



Ron Gejon Photography



Aggressive Comix



Ron Gejon Photography

could see how much he meant to the community and how his passion for bringing happiness and positivity to everyone around him was felt. In truth, I think his positive outlook on life flowed through the whole convention. I kept noting how there was such a great vibe to the convention. Everyone was enjoying themselves, vendors never seemed bored, and lines for concessions never too long.

I ended my fall with the convention that has challenged San Diego Comic Con this year as the largest comic convention in the United States, New York Comic Con. There were an astounding number of attendees that weekend with projections of over 150,000 people. Tickets completely sold out online in less than two hours and over 1,000 people camped outside of Midtown Comics overnight to snag theirs in person. The convention itself was packed with fans of comics, video games, and anime with some of the biggest companies in those fields displaying upcoming projects and demos. The largest celebrity guest line-up they've ever had gave NYCC the opportunity to host some of the most anticipated panels from the most popular shows today. Overall the convention was big, loud, and jam-packed with amazing comic and independent artists like Artgerm, who I had been dying to meet. It's definitely claiming its place as the big convention of the year on the East Coast.

See you all next issue when I go international from Canada to Mexico!



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Megaship Cosplay Photography



Megaship Cosplay Photography



Megaship Cosplay Photography



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The World of Paper Craft Cosplay

... With Yunmao Ayakawa



Hello, *Otaku USA* readers! This is Yunmao Ayakawa. Are you enjoying a happy otaku life? I was very happy recently to watch a lot of anime series!

In this issue, I will present Paper Craft Cosplay to you. Many cosplayers enjoy recreating anime and manga characters with costumes, wigs, props, makeup, and color contact lenses. But Paper Craft Cosplay is a unique form of cosplay



that only uses paper! The inventor is DATIWAWA, who was a Japan finalist at the World Cosplay Summit and also is known for his comical stage performances. Enjoy his interview and pretty paper craft cosplay!

What kinds of cosplay events do you usually go to?
I like to see kids smiling, so I tend to go to events held at amusement parks and shopping centers.

What made you become a cosplayer?
I was a member of a theatrical club in high school, and I made a robot suit for an event. But the event did not need the suit, so I decided to wear it at a cosplay event.

Was the suit made of paper?
Yes. I made (classic anime robot) CombattlerV with only paper. It was the summer of 1995! The quality was horrible, but people said it was innovative and unique. Since then, I've been making paper craft for 19 years.



How did you get an idea of using paper for making costumes?
It was a matter of necessity (laugh). When I did not get a robot I wanted from my parents, I just decided to make it for myself. The robot, I guess, became big enough to wear as I kept remaking it. And it is fun to make a robot costume with little money spent on it.

What do you need to make paper craft cosplay?
Cardboard, craft board, double-sided tape, metallic spray, weathering spray, and a little bit of courage.

How do you make paper craft?
Use cardboard for big parts such as the body and legs, color craft paper for a head and arms, use a pencil and scissors for the edge and fold it, use spray for color—silver highlight for a robot and patchy patterns for a monster—and smoke gray weathering spray.

What are some of your best crafts so far?
I like Samurai Megazord, Box Miku, and Malboro.

What is your philosophy of paper craft cosplay?
Use paper and spray effectively! That's it! You can make a high-quality costume, which is as good as metal, wood, and fiber reinforced plastics. You can make paper look soft and hard; anything is possible. Paper craft cosplay is lightweight so it is good for stage performances. I



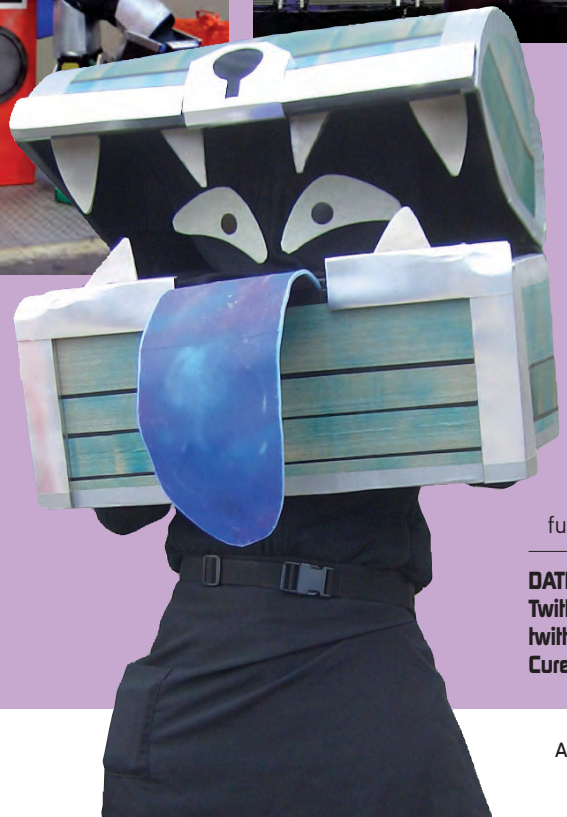












pay special attention to the joint parts, so it moves smoothly and makes me perform easily and comically

What is the best part of paper craft cosplay?
It is fun! I feel like a gigantic toy. And I don't have to worry about making a mistake. It is just paper, so I can easily start over. If I use a rare material, I cannot make any mistakes.

What is the most difficult part?
Since my costume is made of paper, rain and wind can be problems! I need to check the weather forecast before going to an outside event. And it sometimes difficulty to carry a paper costume...

Do you have any advice for people who want to try paper craft cosplay?
Don't be afraid of making a mistake. Paper is inexpensive, and you will learn from your mistakes. Have a lot of double-sided tape since you will use a lot and run out of tape very quickly. Make sure you put your knife away after using it. Or you will step on it and get a cut!

Tell me about your stage performance at TOKYO GAME SHOW.
I created a short story in which Hatsune Miku looked back at SEGA's old games such as the Genesis, SegaSaturn, DreamCast. This is a kind of comedy performance, but only middle-aged men were laughing. I really enjoyed this performance, thinking SEGA's glory and failure faded in the past

Why did you start cosplay performances?
I wanted to compete as a Japanese performer at the World Cosplay Summit. Cosplay stage performance in Japan is not as popular as overseas, so I am hoping that there will be more opportunities for cosplayers to do stage performances.

What are your memorable moments of being a paper craft cosplayer?
When I go to events held at amusement parks and shopping centers, I am often asked to be in a picture with the audiences. I feel very happy that I would be a part of their memories, and my picture will be a part of their life.

What are your future goals and challenges?
I would love to design two robots that transform and also combine together and present an awesome robot performance on the stage.

It is amazing that DATIWAWA has 19 years of experience doing Paper Craft Cosplay! I hope you enjoyed his interview and craft work. Please check out this YouTube videos—you can see his cute and funny performances!

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MUSIC REVIEWS

By Hiroko Yamamura

The Best Are Up to Bat

New release round up



Scandal

Hello World

I should probably preface this entire review by letting you guys know that Scandal is actually one of my all-time favorite Japanese rock bands. Since the band formed more than eight years ago, they've allowed their sound to develop, at times in ways I wasn't really crazy about. If you had a chance to read my review of last year's *Standard,* you might recall my criticism of their sound becoming overly polished and a bit too restrained. While *Standard* had its merits, the band had departed from the raw sounds and quirks that made me fall in love with it in the first place.

I feel like the Osaka-based quartet has been really listening to these criticisms and has responded with the fantastic new album, *Hello World.* It's as if the title serves as a reintroduction to the band for fans. In the spirit of this, let's make sure anyone who isn't up to speed gets familiar with the players. First up is Haruna Ono, who is the band's main singer and plays secondary guitar. On the second axe is Mami Sasazki, who also takes on vocal duties, creating blistering guitar builds and heart-melting melodies. On bass is the stunning Tomomi Ogawa, also providing backup on the mic. Finally is the machine-like Rina Suzuki, who isn't scared to lend her voice to a song from time to time. Still sporting the original lineup that used to play street performances together in high school, Scandal has become the measurement to compare most popular female rock bands against.

Overall, I'm pleased to say that *Hello World* hits all of the sweet spots. The album ditches the idol styles in favor of their signature light pop-punk sounds, arriving at something way less restrained, and far more endearing than last year's *Standard.* The vocals are far more upfront, guitars twang a bit less unruly, and the energy is turned up to 10. I would go as far as saying the album has a whole lot more heart this time around.



The first stand out on the album is the blistering opener "Image." Its rapid pace, heartfelt vocals, and simple power chords set the atmosphere for the album perfectly. Each member really is given her moment to shine, the basslines are clear, and you feel every snap of Rina banging on the snare drum with conviction. It's the perfect feel good kind of rock song that's been sorely missing from Japan's rock charts.

Next up is the fourth track on the album, "Departure." While it's not the most upbeat number on the album, it really has my favorite vocals. Tomomi fans will love her back and forth singing with Haruna. It really puts both ladies on the forefront, giving both of them their moments to shine. It's the closet song that comes to a ballad on the album and is worth the price of admission for Tomomi alone. It's relaxing, reflective, and sweet all at once.

Another amazing song comes in at track number 8 with "Runners High." No, this isn't a cover of the classic Pillows Track, but don't let that disappoint you. The song was initially released as a split single with T.M. Revolution as the soundtrack to the CAPCOM game *Sengoku Basara.* It's a high-octane full pop number, with the ladies donning more of an idol group aura. That doesn't mean that there's no flaring guitar solos, sweeping vocals, or fantastic bass scales to keep the soul of the track pure. When Scandal dips into its bigger sounds, this is the direction it should stick to.

The band has recently announced a world tour in support of new album, crossing Asia, Europe, Mexico, and finally the United States. The dates of the US shows haven't been announced yet, but you can be sure I'll be there front and center. If listening to this fantastic new album doesn't have you aching to see the band play live, I don't think you and I really see eye to eye on music. Do yourself a favor and pull up their newest music videos on Youtube and prepare to be astounded at how great popular Japanese rock music can be when you put real talent behind instruments.

Bump of Chicken

Parade & Fighter

Few rock bands in Japan are met with such enthusiasm at the mere mention of their name quite like Chiba Japan's Bump of Chicken. It really does seem like the hot band at the moment, with a strong following among Western audiences as well. While it has maintained popularity for quite sometime, it seems

like there's no avoiding the band that is now celebrating 20 years together. Once you listen to its unique sound you will understand why everyone seems to want to get their Bump on.

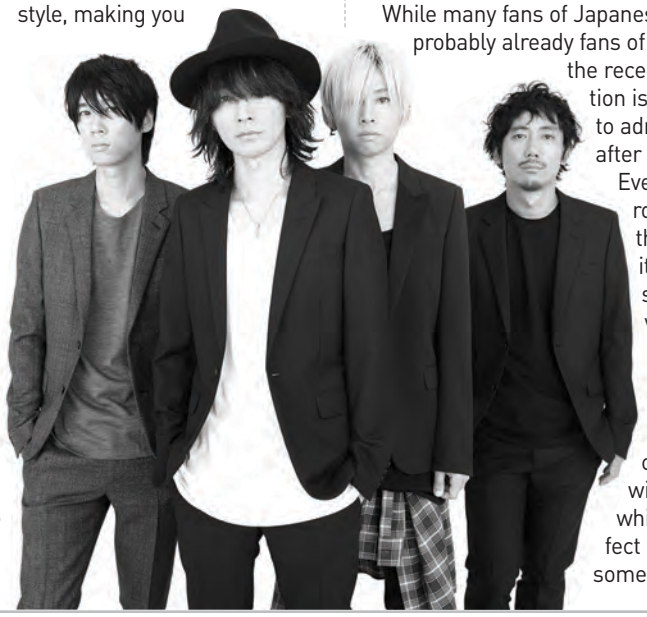
The band members are actually all friends that go all the way back to elementary school. While some of them lost touch with each other at some point, they luckily found their way back to each other in junior high, deciding to form a Beatles cover band. The finally pulled their resources together in 1998 during college to release their first limited CD, and the world was exposed to Bump of Chicken. If you think that the band's name is a bit bizarre, I don't think that frontman Motoo Fujiwara would disagree with you. Apparently the name was an attempt to roughly translate the phrase "Cowards strike back" and ended up with Bump of Chicken. It's kind of a fun translation and definitely gets you bizarre looks when your friends ask what song you are playing on your car stereo.





"Parade" is the newest single from the group and is featured on the new live-action adaptation of the *Parasyte* film. From its eerie piano intro and Motoo's uniquely processed vocals, the track continues to slowly build, never quite relinquishing its pace. A friend of mine aptly described the track like you are "holding your breath" from beginning to finish. It's a perfect introduction to Bump of Chicken's unique sound and style, making you interested in the band from the first note.

Released the day before was the stand-alone single for "Fighter." The slightly more traditional rock song features smooth, straightforward vocals, delivered sweetly and in a poignant fashion. The track crests over and over, creating that signature overwhelming Bump of Chicken sensation. Guitarist Masukawa Hiaroaki's light pickwork is fantastic here, reminiscent of something you would hear from U2's The Edge. You really have to sit back and enjoy Motoo's voice here and how incredibly captivating it is. "Fighter" was featured as a video soundtrack to the manga *3-gatsu no Lion*.



While many fans of Japanese rock are probably already fans of Bump of Chicken, the recent increased attention is something to admire, especially after 20 years together. Even with many new rock bands pushing the envelope daily, it's interesting to see the level that veterans can take it to and continue pushing sounds toward. If for some reason you haven't checked back in with the band for a while, this is the perfect time to witness something really special.



 By Daryl Surat

Golden Throats

Interviews with voice actors Tohru Furuya and Yuko Minaguchi



At Anime Weekend Atlanta 2014, we got a few minutes to talk with Tohru Furuya, best known in the US for his roles as Tuxedo Mask in Sailor Moon, *Yamcha in* Dragon Ball, *and Amuro Ray from* Mobile Suit Gundam. *(The announcement that he'd be voicing Sabo in* One Piece *was made after this interview.) Accompanied by Yuko Minaguchi, the voice of* Sailor Moon*'s Sailor Saturn and Videl (and Pan) from* Dragon Ball, *there were so many fans waiting for autographs that we opted for less time. Even we couldn't get into the* Dragon Ball *and* Sailor Moon *Q&A!*



Otaku USA: You had the role of Tasuke Tokugawa in 1979's *Space Battleship Yamato: The New Voyage,* then 30 years later reprised the role in 2009's *Space Battleship Yamato: Resurrection.* Can you compare your experience playing the role then versus now?

TF: I remember the original *Yamato* much better. I forgot I actually did *Resurrection* until you mentioned it! But in *The New Voyage,* Tokugawa is the new recruit surrounded by veterans. It was the same for me. I was a brand-new voice actor surrounded by veteran talent, so some of that experience being nervous standing in front of the mic translated onto the screen since this new character is nervous around his superiors. Similarly, by *Resurrection,* Tokugawa has been promoted. Now he's the one overseeing the new generation. Again, it's the same for me: now I'm the veteran voice actor. It almost feels like I have my own subordinates in terms of the voice acting world, so once again I could use that experience in terms of my character now bossing around others on screen.

***Yawara! A Fashionable Judo Girl* was tremendously popular in Japan and lasted well beyond the 1996 Olympics. What do you think was the essence of her appeal?**

YM: Before becoming anime, *Yawara!* was in a weekly manga so by the time the series started in 1989 the staff and the cast were saying, "It'd be great if this lasts for a year!" So then, just as a joke, they put in "X many days until the 1992 Barcelona Olympics!" at the end of each episode. But then it slowly actually became reality! I think it was so long-lasting and popular because judo is a very unique sport to use for a show meant for girls. That was pretty different from what you would normally see. Also, the character of Yawara herself is a regular, more relatable girl who's just surrounded by these unique, strange people, and instead of being one-shot stories it was an ongoing serial.

Mr. Furuya, we know you have a long, storied history of being a voice actor but there was also an occasion where you did voice direction. How did you enjoy doing that, and did your prior experience as an actor influence your approach to directing?

TF: Huh? I don't have any voice directing...

You didn't do the voice direction for Super Dodgeball on the Neo Geo?

[At this point, Tohru Furuya's voice trails off and his face momentarily contorts. Like a Vietnam veteran hearing a helicopter passing by overhead, there is a flashback to past turmoil behind his eyes. Yuko Minaguchi starts laughing.]

TF: Oh ... right ... that. So ... one of the things I felt was that there were very few recording directors whom I personally trusted. I started thinking, "How hard can this be? I can do this myself with all my experience!" But I was always used to being behind the mic, and this time I was sitting behind the mixer. That's when I realized it was a completely different experience. Instead of having to focus on just acting out my part, now I had to consider everything at once and see the bigger picture. I had to balance everyone's roles to bring out all the characters, not just my own. While I was very comfortable directing individual actors, it was really new and difficult having to consider all of their performances while also thinking about how their voices interacted with the music and sound effects. As a voice actor, you're done when the recording light's off. But if you're a director, then you're working ALL WEEK. That's not my style! Also, the pay is bad. I actually got an offer to direct an anime series after that, but if I took it that'd be one less job for someone who's a full-time voice director that needed it more.

It occurs to me that our readers would never forgive us if we did not ask at least one *Mobile Suit Gundam* question. For decades now there has been a divide between fans regarding whether or not the better character is Amuro Ray or Char Aznable. Why do you think Amuro has had such long-lasting appeal to fans over "bad pretty boy" Char?

[Tohru and Yuko converse over this for a bit before he replies.]

TF: Amuro is pure. He's pure-hearted, with a sense of justice, and he's kind and gentle. This makes him the opposite of Char, who's totally wrong. Also, Char uses women to fight. He's a bad guy. That's not my style either.

As we leave, I'm asked about my New Japan Pro Wrestling lion mark shirt which I'm wearing. I note "perhaps the fan split between Hiroshi Tanahashi and Shinsuke Nakamura matches that of Amuro and Char?" Maybe nobody else got it, but Furuya laughs and nods, and that's good enough for me.


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